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WARREN KNOWLES

WARREN KNOWLES

A NOVEL

BY
ALAN JAMES GULSTON

IN THREE VOLUMES

'DEEDS SHOW'

VOL. III

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WARREN KNOWLES



CHAPTER I

PETER WARD sat in his private room, he wrote long and carefully, he hesitated one moment, and then, only half-satisfied, wrote down:—

‘So trust not woman, she is all disguise,
But ne’er her cunning will deceive the wise.’

‘Ah! well, is she “all disguise?”’ passed through his brain; and then there came a knock outside his window. He arose, and having opened a small shutter, peered out

into the night. He could merely distinguish two figures, but who or what they were, was beyond his power of vision. He opened the window.

‘Who are you? and what do you want?’

‘We are gipsies,’ answered the old woman.

‘We come to seek your help.’

‘Come round to the side-door, and I will let you in.’

As they entered the lighted room, Peter Ward scarcely looked at them; he, again ere he put away his papers, passed his eyes over the line, ‘so trust not woman, she is all disguise!’ He then left his papers, and turning towards the women, said, half-aloud, ‘So trust not woman, she is all disguise!’ and stood before them lost in thought. To the old woman he appeared wrapt in some hidden conjuration, and she remembered, how at night storms came; how men perished by unknown causes: how woman moaned over the absence of those she loved; how at night cattle died, and trees were felled; and how all the evils seemed to cease at the morning light. To Kathleen his words appeared to come from the wonderful prescience of a magician; even as she had entered, without a look towards her, he had penetrated her

secret, for she had heard his words, 'so trust not woman, she is all disguise.' In patience they, much impressed by his manner and words, remained standing, silently side by side; unwittingly he acted his part to perfection. At last rousing himself, and addressing the old gipsy, he said,

'Now woman, your request?

'Nan,' answered the old gipsy; 'has an enmity to avenge; can you help her? she has gold.'

'Vengeance is mine!' muttered Peter Ward.

'Yes,' continued she; vengeance is in your power, I know, help us now, and we will pay.'

Peter Ward was again lost in thought; this time he meditated how to avert from their enemy the wickedness resolved on by the two dark-haired women now before him.

'Give me the name of your enemy and his dwelling. Deceive me not, for unless to me you speak truth, this vengeance will miss your object. Make me mistake the name and another will suffer.'

The gipsy looked at Kathleen, who on her side deeply felt the truth of all he had said, 'mistake the name, and another will suffer.'

She was convinced that the real name must be spoken, not John Smith, but John Hilton. She remembered, how a name mistaken, and John Gaunt even now perhaps was dead. Most willingly she answered,

‘His name is John Hilton, and he dwells at the head-keeper’s lodge; include his dog, “Slip,” and let them both die the death.’

‘So be it,’ answered Peter Ward. ‘The dog, “Slip,” and his master, John Hilton,’ and then there flashed across his memory that ‘Slip’ was the faithful follower of John Smith, the keeper, to whom, and through whom, much gratitude from him was due; and he felt convinced that their John Hilton was none other but his friend, John Smith. That night was Warren Knowles’ kindness twenty-fold repaid.

‘I must seek power from the king of darkness ere I can work a curse on John Hilton and Slip. Come again to me on the first new moon.’

‘What! wait a fortnight!’ exclaimed Kathleen, ‘never! A bullet or poison shall at once do the work! I say at once! and so it shall be!’

‘Even as you wish,’ continued Peter Ward. ‘If I give you poison, can you find means of

using it? It is a precious herb and leaves no trace behind; but once fully prepared, all its virtue will depart unless quickly utilised.'

Kathleen looked at the old gipsy, who immediately answered,

'Old Brooks' maid-of-all-work is easily bought. She would, with good pay, undertake to put it into the milk. She milks the two cows, so there is no difficulty.'

'Wait!' uttered Peter Ward, and left the room. In his pantry he folded a piece of white paper into an oblong shape, and placed therein a small quantity of flour, sprinkled a little white sugar on it, and, having returned to his own room, he wrote on it three Greek letters, and gave it to Kathleen. She held out a handful of gold; he looked at it; the temptation was great. He had known poverty, and the agony of helplessly gazing on a hungry son; but he drew back and said, 'Nay, when the work is done then pay me. I love to help a gipsy!'

'You do,' answered the old woman; 'the gipsies owe you much.'

The two women silently went out into the dark night, and trod their way towards Knowle Manor. A strong wind blew, and

the rain came down ; no word was spoken until their ways separated ; then Kathleen said,

‘I will keep your red cloak, it may be of use ; and mine is good pay for it. How can I find you when needful ?’

‘Come to our tents, and fear not. The way is open to you, although open to few. Let me have what the cunning man gave you ; at early morn I will see the milk-maid ; and John Smith shall have his first taste of death before you again open your pretty eyes.’

They separated, and the gipsy woman hastened to her tent ; and a tent also has its luxuries ; no better food than the supper she indulged in ; no warmer lair than the comfortable mattress and blankets, overlaid by a fur rug, sadly missed by the bagman, from whose carriage it had been purloined. There she slept, until the sun had for many hours warmed the gipsy glen. She knew that ‘the pretty lady’ at the Manor would not be seen early, and was satisfied that she would not come that way until to-morrow, if even then. They separated, and little did either the wealthy wife or the poor widow suspect that their path had been dogged ;

but wind and rain had drowned all noise, while Peter Ward followed on their track. As soon as they had left his house, he had at first used great caution, but when the storm burst he drew nearer to them: at their separation he was close, and heard their last words. He let the gipsy go her way unfollowed, while he carefully trod in Kathleen's steps. He had not suspected her until now; now the whole truth flashed on him, and ere she entered the Manor, he had guessed her rank and wealth, and knew the power that endangered his benefactor, John Smith. Much he felt pleased at the deceit he had used at this opportunity of repaying in some degree the keeper's kindness. At a slow pace and most heedfully, he returned to the cover of the woods, and although not well acquainted with the way, he still in due course came to Daddy Brooks' lodge. No light came from any watcher; all within was dark and still. He sat down under shelter of the large oak and waited. The wind slackened and the rain ceased, while a slight streak of light announced the coming day. Pickard was now dimly seen as he emerged from the morning mist; he tapped at a window, and half-an-hour later all was life and

movement. The 'maid-of-all-work'—even as the gipsy woman had said—came out pail in hand, and after a short delay passed in calling the two cows from the woods, she duly milked them. Men came and went, the dogs rushed out, capering and rolling on the cool grass, but no gipsy woman appeared. Still Peter Ward sat quietly under the large oak tree, biding his time, until John Smith should come out, but fate determined otherwise, for one dog taking a longer turn than was usually allowed winded him. Its bark and desire to run up to the oak tree brought Brooks forward. Peter Ward met the head-keeper half-way, and stated his wish to see John Smith. When shown in, he was at once recognised by the man he sought, who had just finished breakfast, but nevertheless insisted that the new-comer should refresh himself; and looked on with pleasure, while the other satisfied his appetite, which a night out of bed and a long morning walk had fully developed. Peter Ward interested his host by his account of his interview, all his doings and deceits with the apparently gipsy women, but when he came to their separation, and how one took the road towards the mansion then Knowles' attention increased. The

description given and the whole affair proved to Knowles that his enemy and would-be murderess was his old acquaintance, Kathleen—Mrs Greville. In his heart he bewailed her wickedness ; to Peter Ward he said,

‘And such being the case, what do you propose to do?’

‘I wait your wishes ; if you wish to prosecute the lady, I am a most willing witness ; I am at your command.’

Knowles leant back in his chair, and for a short time thought over the whole story. His decision was soon made.

‘No, Mr Peter Ward, we must take the business easily ; I shall stay here ; after a couple of days I will contrive to look ill, and be thought to be so by all those with whom I associate ; I will even, one morning lie in bed, in order that those about the place may report the situation to the gipsy, who will of course tell the lady at the Manor House. In a few days I will let the maid hear me complain how sick I feel ; and after that, I will act in the right way, in order to confirm the idea that I am very ill, and sick even unto death, or dead. Peter Ward bade him to be very careful to avoid all appearance of illness until he was

assured that the pretended poison had been used, and this either by the knowledge that the old gipsy had spoken to the maid-of-all-work, or by the taste and sediment of the milk. He rose and went his way. Knowles accompanied him through the estate until they came to the highroad, and thus all difficulty about the right way to the lodge was at end. Knowles, with still more care again, mentally revolved his position. What a strange predicament he was in! hunted to death by a woman who, by her talent, acuteness, and beauty, had risen, from being a barmaid of a backwood store, to the enviable rank of an English lady—a woman who had certainly liked him from the beginning, but whom it was utterly impossible that he could ever love; and thus naturally his thoughts reverted to Ethel; then quickly came the conviction, that if once his love for her was known to his enemy, all danger would encompass her, whom he so truly loved. He thoroughly saw and understood the danger, and from this time forward, all his efforts were to watch Kathleen and circumvent her evil designs. He began by instructing Brooks, that he and his wife should watch over their maid-servant, and,

if possible report to him when the gipsy had been at, or near the lodge. He never went out without seeing well to his dog Slip; for although he had been bought of the gipsies, he nevertheless bore great dislike to them, and so much so, that, with one exception, he never met, or even came on the track of a gipsy without showing signs of anger, and Knowles at once knew by the peculiarity of the growl, that it was caused by an indweller of the tents, and by nothing else. He also at dawn, even before he undid the shutter, ordered his dog 'To watch,' and as the window was open outside the closed shutter, the dog could mark anything strange, or unusual. The first morning passed by quietly; but on the second, even before the peep of day, Slip uttered his peculiar growl, and Knowles guessed that the old gipsy was at hand. He opened the shutter, dropped out, and quickly began to make a circuit round the lodge; but no gipsy was there.

'Well, Slip, what is it?' The dog sat down, and looked wistfully at his master; his whole attitude and expression implied a wish to obey.

'Well, old fellow, find for me a gipsy; but no noise. Quiet! quiet!'

The dog, in a slow trot, returned to the window, and thence slowly followed a scent down a bye-path. Knowles went with him, and just as the path passed into the opening (where, a few nights before, Kathleen and the old woman had sat down to rest), the hair on the dog's back rose, and his master, laying his hand on the animal's back, stopped all further progress. There, in the open glade, he plainly espied the old hag occupied in driving the two cows towards the lodge. She let them take their own way and time; and so he loitered back without ever letting the cows pass from his sight. They were still some distance from the lodge when the maid began her call to the cattle, and he was enabled to witness their meeting. He could not hear a word; but the action and interest shown on both sides confirmed him in the belief that one was instructing the other how to serve Kathleen, and his doubts, if he even had any, would have been removed by seeing a small packet placed in the maid-servant's hands. He and his dog waited patiently, and when all was clear, returned to his room. At the usual hour the breakfast was brought; ere he used the milk, he carefully examined it, and the tokens of some

admixture were palpable. Even after Peter Ward's explanation that the powder supposed to be poison was merely flour with a little sugar, he would not trust it, but poured the whole of it on to the grass, and would not allow Slip to touch it. He threw some loose mould on it; he knew Kathleen's cunning, and felt assured that Peter Ward's false poison might have been exchanged for something more deadly and more sure—gipsies can manufacture most killing draughts, and Kathleen might have suspected the cunning man. He let the day go by in his usual avocations; and even employed himself for two pleasant hours in fly-fishing for trout, and sent up to the Manor, by Pickard, a basket of speckled beauties. As night fell he returned home, and complained of sickness to both Brooks and his wife, in the presence of the servant-maid. Nevertheless having done full justice, and perhaps even more than usual, to his evening meal, he gave Slip credit for the quantity consumed. Next morning he spoke of headache, and walked out at a slow melancholy pace, which quickened the further he got from the lodge. He called at Pickard's cottage, and merely saying that he was hungry after a long

walk, gave the requisite money to the widowed mother; so that on returning, some hours afterwards, he found and enjoyed a good but plain dinner. At the lodge that evening his meal was untouched, and he read, as was his wont, far into the night; when as he laid himself on the bed, and felt the sleepiness of health and exercise steal over him, then he returned thanks, that not only had he shown pity and kindness to Peter Ward and his family, but that also the Wards had fully appreciated his deeds, and had shown active gratitude. During a day or so more he remained with Brooks, taking his usual walks, and keeping up the appearance of illness and all other precautions, although always looking forward with pleasure to his daily dinner and conversation with the widow Pickard. Once he secretly visited Peter Ward, who had neither seen nor heard anything more from either gipsy or lady.

‘But, Mr Smith,’ he said; ‘it is high time that you should be dead. According to the lady’s wishes and expectations, yesterday should have seen the last of you. Take my advice, die to-morrow, or be assured that more active means will be taken in order to

bring that pleasing catastrophe to pass. Can you not manage it to-morrow ?'

'Thank you, Mr Peter Ward, for the kind interest you take in getting me safely killed. To-morrow shall be my last day ; I have already made arrangements. If you should have anything to tell me send me a letter through the hands of Daddy Brooks.'

'Good-day, Mr Smith ; do it carefully, and do it well. That lady will not sit down in contented ignorance of your whereabouts. She means murder, and will have it.'

Again, on his return home, Knowles complained how ill he felt, while the maid was actually arranging hot water in his room, in order to bathe his feet, gave a detailed account to old Brooks of his visit to a medical man, and how he had been recommended to go to an hospital. The evening was again passed in reading. As the clock struck twelve he closed his book, and quickly passing his small portmanteau out of the window into Brooks' hands, he himself dropped down, pulled to the shutter, and from the outside fastened the window. He and the keeper, together with his faithful dog Slip, walked for about an hour, until they came to a small lane. There they found

John Gaunt with a cart and donkey ; the portmanteau was put in ; and, leaving Gaunt to look after the game, Knowles followed by Brooks and the donkey cart, walked up the hills at the back of Knowle Manor. These hills were wild and poor of soil ; catching the mist and clouds, they grew little else but heather. After some miles they ceased, and then came a district which, although within a long walk of Knowle Manor, was altogether utterly different and separated ; there was no direct intercourse between the inhabitants of this sparsely-peopled district and the country he was just leaving ; there removed from all highroads, and invasion of travellers, they felt assured that all was safe ; and as had previously been arranged, Brooks left the portmanteau at a small farm, in order to return home. Knowles had already given full instructions to the keeper, and more particularly to let him know every thing that happened at the Manor, and anything else that might occur, but most especially (mind that, most especially !) all about Mr and Miss Beal. Brooks received the message with judicious seriousness ; in his heart Knowles suspected that Brooks knew more on this subject than he choose to

express, but no confidence had ever passed between them, and he left all to the truth and known honesty of the old keeper. They parted, Knowles to his rest, the keeper to his journey back over the hills. Old Brooks cheerfully performed his walk homeward; much he enjoyed the sight of the grouse, and the rich hues of the heather. He meditated deeply on all the young squire had done; and his experience of life told him that it was almost time that this hiding as a gamekeeper should cease; and resolved to lay this before Knowles on the first favourable opportunity. In meantime he bethought him of a small plan, which would completely mystify any one who sought to harm his young master. At the appointed time John Gaunt met him in the lane, and took over the care of cart and donkey, and received a message for John Pickard to come up to the lodge in the afternoon, at an hour when the servant-maid would be out, and this her absence Brooks secured by sending her to purchase necessities in the village. At the right time Pickard came, and according to the keeper's pre-conceived plan, went straightway into Knowles' room, and into his bed; and long ere the maid came back, all was ready.

Pickard's clothes were placed out of sight, and Mrs Brooks informed the woman that John Smith was dangerously ill, and had again seen the doctor, who said his illness was most serious. Dinner was not even prepared for the invalid, and a small basin of gruel, made ready, was not touched. Next morning, while the maid was at the milking. Pickard, wrapped in blankets—but underneath dressed in his usual clothes—was placed in a cart, and as on her return she exclaimed, 'Dear me! Mrs Brooks, what's the matter?' that worthy dame answered, 'It is poor John Smith going to the hospital. I do not think we shall see him again.' The maid hastened her work, and immediately that it was done, ran to the gipsy encampment, and in hurried accents told all to the old woman who had bribed her to give the poison, and instructed her in all she should do. The old hag dissipated the maid's fears, sent her away satisfied that all was right, and that even an hospital doctor could not detect the poison. This done, she herself took the way to Knowle Manor, and had an interview with Kathleen. In answer to the inquiries, she could only say that the hospital usual for the sick of the district was at

Evenchurch ; and so having again received a reward for her zeal, went away. As before said, gold stimulates the brain and electrifies the understanding, the gipsy hag therefore, instead of going to her home, sought the keeper's lodge, and as she passed close to the door noted the cartwheels, and particularly remarked that only one pair had been there that morning. She thus learnt that the supposed John Smith had been removed in a vehicle with two wheels and one horse, and that Brooks and another man were the only attendants. She easily followed the tracks on the soft grass, and in the rough and almost unused lanes ; but when she reached the highroad the task became more difficult. For some distance she slowly traced the cart, but every moment it became more puzzling ; at last she gave up the hope of following the mere track, and walked forward for a few miles at a brisk pace, until she arrived at Evenmill turnpike gate. Here, to her inquiries, the gatekeeper could not say much. He could not say positively, but thought, that one cart was accompanied by two men, and if that was the cart she sought, it could not be more than a short distance ahead. Again she

walked on. She met a vehicle, and inquired about the cart she wished to overtake. The driver said,

‘Yes, he had seen a cart with two men, but that happened some way ahead, if she stuck to the right road she might overtake it,’ and bid her ‘Good-day.’

Now this man was the very fellow, who not only owned the cart in which Pickard had been removed, but had also driven, and in fact was still driving it. About a couple of hours now passed, he and Brooks had stopped at the ‘Blue Nose,’ public house, and having put the horse and cart, sick man and all, under a shed, they entered, and Brooks treated himself and this carter to bread and cheese, and a good allowance of ale. There they enjoyed an hour’s rest when the keeper paid the score, and they returned to the shed. Safe enough were the horse and cart, but the sick man and the two blankets were gone, not a trace left behind. No one at the ‘Blue Nose,’ knew aught about it. Brooks, feigning astonishment, stood bye, and scratched his head, while his companion stared at the cart, as if he felt confident that his eyes were deceiving him.

‘I tell you what it is, carter,’ at length

said Brooks, 'the less we say about this the better. Perhaps some kind farmer or other has taken him on in his gig? But the two blankets, d'ye see, are also gone! I tell you what it is; you go home and keep your tongue quiet; and to all inquiries not a word about all this shall ever pass my lips.'

'Yes, master, that is what we must do—go home and say naught.'

'Then get up and let us be moving.'

'Yes, master; will you not get up also?'

'No, thank ye,' answered the keeper, 'you go quietly and by yourself; and if anyone asks you about a cart with two men or a sick man in it; say you did see it, and some way on; and mind you, that is the truth.'

The carter turned his cart towards home; and when he met the gipsy hag, he followed out Brooks' advice. Meanwhile the head-keeper had overtaken Pickard in a bye-lane, and they trudged on together by an unfrequented route. In due time they rejoiced Mrs Brooks with their cheerful voices and most welcome presence. The gipsy woman was still striving to do good work, and earn some further recompense, when the noise of wheels told her the soundness of her conclusion that Mrs Greville would also try

to overtake the cart and sick man. She drew aside, but so that Mrs Greville could not well have passed without perceiving her. Kathleen ordered the carriage to stop, and having beckoned the hag to her, began by asking after a sick man, and 'Poor fellow !' she continued, 'how is he now ?'

'Not well at all, ma'am,' answered the gipsy ; 'he is now on his way to the hospital ; in a short time you are sure to overtake him ; he is in a one-horse cart, and two men are with him ; he is wrapped in blankets, so you cannot well miss him.'

'Then he is bound for Evenchurch Hospital, I suppose ?'

'Well, I think so too, but I cannot say positively.'

'If you will come to see me to-morrow, I will tell you all about him,' finished Kathleen, and she drove on. No cart, no sick man, no sign of Hilton.

She even drove to the hospital, but was there assured that only two patients had on that day been admitted, and they were both women. During her way home she meditated and wondered ; with all her cunning and ready wit, she could not solve the mystery. She inquired where the other

nearest hospital was situated. It was distant twenty miles, and in another direction. The only solution she could arrive at was, that the two men had found out that Hilton had money, and so perhaps had robbed and murdered him.

‘Let us wait,’ had Kathleen thought; ‘time will solve the secret; John Smith must be either dead or alive. If dead, he has had the punishment I wished; and it is pleasing to know that unless I had administered to him the cunning man’s dose, he never would have been thus happily robbed and murdered. If alive, he must seek the means of living; and where could he earn better wages than as a gamekeeper on this estate? We shall hear, in all probability, either of the finding of his body, or see him again in his old employment. She asked the gipsy woman, but she knew nothing more, and although she had questioned each man and woman of her tribe, none could add a word of information. John Smith, alias Hilton, had disappeared, and left not a trace behind. She pronounced in favour of his murder, and assured her rich friend that the very mystery inclined her to the idea, that gipsies had a hand in it. Day followed

day, and nothing was heard about John Smith. Kathleen was unwilling to lose her still sick husband yet ; she had her own schemes for developing herself into a rich widow, and then with the help of beauty, wealth, and position, to rise considerably higher in the scale of rank ; but the time had not yet come to shake off the encumbrance of a first husband. Having now plenty of leisure on her hands, she devoted some of it to Mr Greville, great was his astonishment at her frequent visits, yet from his knowledge of the world, and his perfect appreciation of his wife's ideas and principles, he never allowed himself to be led into the mistake of attributing her attentions to love or to friendship ; he justly placed them to her desire to enjoy his wealth, and remain the fashionable and rich Mrs Greville. The only deduction to which he arrived was that he must be much more seriously ill than he had been induced to suppose. To Kathleen his illness was a puzzle ; she now was always present at the medical man's visit, and quickly remarked that there was an uncertainty in his treatment. He repeatedly felt the pulse, and examined and questioned his patient in a different way every time he called ; he often remained silent and looked at Greville, as

if for some new clue to his malady; to a question,

‘What do you make out his illness to be?’

‘I am,’ he answered, ‘rather doubtful; his symptoms vary, and the medicines I give do not have their proper effect.’

When alone, her thoughts followed in her own peculiar views; and putting aside the deductions which would naturally have been produced in the mind of anyone of mere worldly knowledge, she came to the conclusion that Greville must be suffering from poison; aye, poison; and not only from one draught, but from several and repeated doses. Her own experiences had taught her, and oftentimes during her infancy and early life, she had heard of strange tales of Indian poison; sometimes how it acted only by small successive quantities; and how again, when once swallowed, it would gradually, most slowly attack the individual, and let considerable time elapse ere its sure and deadly nature matured into effect. She carefully watched Greville, and all that took place in his room; frequently asked him about his feelings and symptoms; and once when he had answered one of her questions,

‘What are your feelings just at present?’

she added, 'I wish to find out what the doctor cannot.'

'What may that be, Mrs Greville?'

'Simply, what is the matter?'

'If you beat the doctor at his own trade, you will be clever.'

Strange that the husband, while quite aware of her cunning and lack of high principle, had never realised the fact that she possessed great natural talents, which circumstances, not education, were developing. Even her hatred and pursuit of Hilton had brought out her powers of induction, and taught her to analyse the feelings and deeds of others. She soon came to her own conviction, and acted on it. She would not consult the medical man, lest at some future day it might interfere with her own ulterior wishes. She ordered her carriage, and, on driving off from the Manor, merely said, 'To Evenchurch.' When there she drove to the hospital, asked for, and was shown to the 'Lady Superintendent of Nurses.' She merely stated her opinion that the nurse now at Knowle Manor was becoming tired out, and that it would be a Christian charity to exchange her for another.

'I would not hurt her feelings by even

hinting at such a thing—she seems to be such a good, kind creature—but it is really necessary.’

The superintendent soon adopted the same view, and in less than half-an-hour Kathleen was on her way back accompanied by another nurse. On her arrival at the Manor she ordered the carriage to wait. Having divested herself of cloak and bonnet, and left the new nurse with the house-keeper, she went up to the sick man’s chamber; she sat for a few minutes by her husband’s bed, and marked how he slept with half-closed eyelids and straightened hands; then addressing the nurse, asked her if she would kindly go to the boudoir, and bring up to her the eau-de-cologne. The moment that the nurse’s footsteps had died in the distance, she took the several phials of medicine and glasses, and carried them into the neighbouring unused dressing-room, locked the door, and put the key into her own pocket. She hurried down the back staircase, and merely saying, ‘You can now come,’ led, at a rather rapid pace, the new nurse upstairs to Greville’s room. To the new-comer she merely said, ‘This is your patient; I will see you again in a few minutes,’ and then having rapidly descended

the main staircase towards the boudoir, met the old nurse on her return with the eau-de-cologne.

‘How long you have been!’ she exclaimed, good-naturedly, ‘while you were absent a new nurse has arrived in order to relieve you for a time, you must be so tired; the housemaid has also cleared away all the old bottles and things, and I have told your sister-nurse to give nothing to the patient until the doctor again comes. I expect him every minute, so come up and say “how d’ye do,” to your friend. You had better at once pack your clothes, as the carriage will be ready for you in ten minutes.’

Kathleen had watched the nurse’s countenance and manner, but only one thing moved her in all Kathleen had said; all else she had received as a matter of course. The words which had for a second brought a change of countenance were, ‘The housemaid has cleared away all the old bottles and things.’

They went up together, and the two women shook hands, and the out-going nurse turned to the table and said,

‘Oh, I declare the housemaid has cleared away my scent bottle. How very foolish; I must ask for it.’

Kathleen well knew that no scent bottle was there, and answered,

‘Impossible, all bottles and everything with medicine, are by my special order thrown into the cesspit. To bring back your scent bottle would require several men to work hard for a couple of days, even if not during a longer time. I am really sorry. If you will tell me what it is like, I will send you a similar one.’

The nurse’s apparent anxiety ceased, and in another quarter-of-an-hour was on her way to Evenchurch Hospital. Kathleen’s suspicion turned out to be right; medical recipes were ordered afresh, the doctor was satisfied, and in the lapse of a week Greville was again nearly well; took to his usual avocations, and his illness seemed forgotten; yes! apparently forgotten by all, but not by Kathleen. She pondered it, she had not the least doubt that her husband had been under the influence of poison, and that the first nurse had been bribed to administer it. She preserved the medicines, lest at any time she might wish to submit them to analysis. She had no doubt as to the giving of poison; the puzzle remained, by whom could the nurse have been bribed? She passed in review nearly

all her acquaintances, and the only person who struck her as capable of all this, was Jack Reily; he would not have hesitated to use poison, provided there was a good and sufficient reason; but what motive could he have? It seemed most improbable, and yet she well knew his villany, and how he delighted in underhand difficult schemes. For some days she remained inactive, she still hesitated in her ideas about Jack Reily; by degrees her brain elaborated her thoughts into more decided points; gradually she conceived what she considered her best course of action. She once again drove to Evenchurch, and from the hotel wrote a note, in which she merely stated, that she wished to see the nurse, by name 'Puritas Toogood.' In about half-an-hour the nurse arrived.

'I am glad to see you,' said Kathleen, offering her hand with kind condescension; 'you must have been glad to hear that Mr Greville quite recovered before it became again your turn for duty.'

'Yes,' sedately answered Puritas Toogood, 'I am glad that the doctor at last found out what really was the matter?'

'What! did he appear doubtful?'

'Yes, every day he seemed to change his

ideas ; and he prescribed new medicines, all of which had effects contrary to what he expected.'

'Yes,' said Kathleen, 'he told me all that, and that from seeing the strange effect, he suspected that the medicines were not carefully made up, or that the apothecary not being in possession of the drug ordered, made use of something which he considered equivalent. In fact, he tasted the medicines, and finding them totally different from his orders, he tried to trace the origin of the difference ; and so the discrepancies ceased, and the patient became well, and, I am happy to say, is likely to continue strong and hearty.'

'It is a great mercy,' responded Puritas Toogood.

'Yes, it is. His friend, Mr John Reily, has recommended a more serious investigation ; and I therefore came here in order to consult with you, who must know more of the case than others possibly can.'

At the mention of the name of Jack Reily, Kathleen marked the slight gleam of intelligence that flitted across the nurse's eyes ; to her it was a confirmation of her doubts and imaginings.

'There can be but one real test!' ex-

claimed Puritas; 'so I regret to say that you have destroyed them.'

'The medical man has some in his possession; he several times removed from the patient's room some half-used medicines.'

Puritas' voice and general demeanour remained the same, but Kathleen remarked a hardening of the features.

'Whatever Mr Greville's friend recommends, should be done.'

'And in all probability will be done,' continued Kathleen; and as Mr Reily wished me to consult you, I have first come to see you; he said that he knew you to be skilful and trustworthy.'

'Anything that you wish me to do I will undertake,' was the cautious answer. Kathleen was fully satisfied that a secret understanding existed between the nurse and Jack Reily.

'I am about to write to Mr Reily,' said Kathleen, 'is there any message or information which you would wish more particularly to have inserted in my letter?'

'No, ma'am; unless to state that while I attended on Mr Greville all orders were faithfully carried out.'

'I will do so,' said Kathleen; and while

she thoroughly comprehended the double meaning of the words, 'all orders were faithfully carried out,' she smiled on Puritas Toogood, and kindly bade her 'Good-bye.'

She returned home, buried in deep thought. She now was fully convinced that Jack Reily had wished to destroy his friend—her husband—Mr Greville. Of this she had no doubt; it was a deduction that admitted of no hesitation, and on it she rested all her reasonings and future action. That very day Jack Reily arrived at Knowle Manor. Cheerful and of great experience, he was a real comfort to Greville, with whom he had long talks and many a pleasing ride. Greville was highly interested in all the labour that his friend had undergone towards his revenge, and the destruction of their present host, 'Old Beal.'

'Aye,' said Jack, 'it was a wet and otherwise a weary day when I called on Lyall, the lawyer; he bowed, and wriggled, and looked, all over, the respectable rascal that he is. "Good-morning," quoth I; "how does our friend Mr Beal get on?" "Ah, poor gentleman," he answered, "a sad state he is in. I have my doubts if he will ever recover. He has made a will, I know, but I

never saw the provisions; it was drawn out and brought to completion by Messrs Downright, Short, and Goode. Ah, it is a sad case, sir—a sad case!” “He will live,” I put in, “to be kicked yet!” “Very likely, sir, very likely; but if he should die, what an immense business he will leave behind him! and no one in the firm possessed of his brains!” “I hope that business has not yet suffered by his continued absence?” “Well,” continued Lyall, “I think not; but just imagine if anything did turn up a little awkwardly, the many and all-important documents are in his name, and no one but he knows all the ins and outs.” There,’ continued Jack Reily, ‘I really believe that the honest fellow was tipping me a hint that if we wish to have a good fling at the Beals, now is our time.’

‘And, may I ask,’ interrupted Greville, whom do you call “the honest fellow”?’

‘Honest John Lyall—most unmistakably!’

‘Oh,’ answered Greville, ‘that is your idea of an honest fellow!’

‘Unmistakably! for he kindly added, “I know Mr Beal well, and better than does any other man; believe me, if anything did go wrong with the firm, he is not strong enough to wrestle with it; and most un-

doubtedly would worry himself to death." There, Greville, now is our time! Run up to town with me for a few days, and let us ruin, kill, and utterly destroy all of the name of Beal.'

'Yes; when you like; but I must once again see the doctor, ere I go. I will write to him, and if disengaged, he will see me to-morrow. At the worst, I can ride over, and call on him; it is a turf ride, and so you also can come.'

When Jack Reily met Kathleen, his bow was a mixture of familiarity and respect; his address, that of a polished gentleman to a lady, with whom he had some intimacy. She saw nothing to resent, and yet felt that his manner implied that he was something more than her—than her familiar friend. Kathleen felt arise within her her habitual love of revenge. She had played for, and won a rich husband; and in this Reily had been everything; had 'coached' her as to manner, behaviour, and dress; without him she could never have succeeded. She acknowledged all this to herself with distaste; no one — no woman especially — will patiently submit to the claim for gratitude from

one who is disliked. Whatever Jack aimed at, Kathleen had determined to unravel. He undoubtedly had intended that Greville should die of poison; her accidental leisure and presence had defeated this intention; now, in a somewhat hilarious tone, he laughed, and concocted plans with his former victim; while to herself his whole bearing was unwelcome. One cloudless morning Kathleen, parasol in hand, strolled through the gardens; she knew that Greville and Reily were about to ride, in order that the former might see the doctor ere they started for town. She had heard the tramp of the horses, as they were led round to the hall-door, and felt secure from intrusion. A tread on the gravel walk caused her to turn, and, with regret, she saw that Reily stood before her. With the deepest respect he bowed—he bowed his best—then recovering his upright position a slight smile parted his lips, and there he remained silent and expectant—he wished her to begin the conversation. She felt that he had purposely left the lead to her; so she had a real pleasure in slightly lowering her parasol and, without a word, turning down another walk. She depended on her husband's impatience to call Reily to

his side ; but he strolled on near to her, and no call came. For a while she acted as if she heeded not his existence, but as time went on she turned and said,

‘Mr Reily, I much wish to be alone!’

‘To-morrow you will be alone! But even if Mrs Greville will not reward me for all I have done, I cannot forget Kathleen O’Byrne. She, whom I raised from poverty, and worse than poverty, to a high and most wealthy position.’

‘You are beyond me, Mr Reily. While Mr Greville was ill you never came near him, and he was left with a nurse, who, we all think, wished to kill him, now you act as his most attentive friend. Of course, I know all about the wishes which you both hold towards the Beals, and in that I am with you. What your ulterior plans are to me is a puzzle.’

‘One word from you, and I will tell you everything—in fact, I sought you now in order to see if you were willing to listen to me.’

‘Mr Reily, you know me ; you know all my previous history—in fact, you know too much. Take my advice—do not try to take advantage of this, your knowledge.’

‘Mrs Greville, be to me as in days gone by ; be Kathleen O’Byrne. To her and for her I will do almost anything ; but for a certain Mrs Greville, who is a beggar on horseback, I will do nothing. Now you know my feelings, you can choose your own line of conduct.’

‘I scarcely understand you ; you speak of Kathleen O’Byrne as someone in existence. Do remember that she has ceased to be.’

‘Kathleen, Mrs Greville—any name you like—there are times when habitual deceit and cunning must cease ; that time has now come to me. Listen to the truth ; for unless you see my object you will never be able to understand my deeds, nor be willing to help me. For once I will speak the truth, it is rare, and you know it, so be wise, and appreciate the occasion. Listen, you are most ambitious, and long for a high position, for title, for power. So do I. You married Greville merely as a step on the ladder ; I am his friend, for the very same reason. I intend to rise ; I am rising ; you know that I am now a Member of Parliament, but now learn for the first time, that I am the owner of Westwood Castle, and also its extensive estates, and when another government comes

in, I shall attain a baronetcy. You have played Greville so as to become in due time a rich widow ; I also have utilized Greville, and am a rich man, and will be richer. In fact we, you and I, have played the same game, and I have as yet played it best ; I am the most successful. Now promise to be my wife, in order to play the game of life with me, and we must win. I could, by a few words, turn Greville altogether against you ; completely checkmate all your further moves. Say, Kathleen, will you be mine altogether ? I not only admire you personally, but I admire your firmness, your cunning, your insight into all the intrigues and crooked ways of clever people ; and above all, your coolness amidst strange scenes and dangers. Be mine ; but mine according to all the proprieties and requisitions of society. As for Greville ; he can easily be shunted, and be put out of the way, once and for ever.'

Kathleen remained silent ; she had, indeed, received a most extraordinary proposal. An immense field for ambition, intrigue, success, was opened to her. She clearly saw, that title and rank, by her so much coveted, were thus to be won. She spake not ; she thought she knew how clever and unscrupulous was

Reily, and yet she had not full confidence in his talents ; there was a want, a vacuum somewhere. She could not say in what, or how, she contemplated his failure, but she always looked forward to it. She strolled on and heeded him not. ' She acknowledged to herself that she was willing to sacrifice herself to anything and everything, provided that she ultimately obtained her object. Reily was a mortal man, even the same as Greville. She started ; for on her ear fell the sound of horse's feet. She looked up and around ; she was alone. Reily, acting on the principle that ' woman's hesitation is man's triumph,' in his worldly wisdom withdrew, went quickly into the library by the window entrance, folded a blank sheet of paper, placed it in an envelope, put thereon a stamp, directed it to himself, and just as Greville's patience was at an end, joined him in the hall, and apologising for the delay, and showing the letter, said,

' Now I am free for the day ; a letter written deserves a holiday. Come along, it is a charming day for a ride.'

They mounted and were off. Reily smiled while he looked at Greville, and guessed that Mrs Greville's thoughts were with him and

his words in that retired walk. As the sound of the horses' feet rang out, he guessed that she had looked up and found him absent. He rejoiced at his own cunning and tact. During the ride he acted no feigned character, but let his natural spirits have way, and talked and laughed. Greville acknowledged to himself, that there were few more pleasant and agreeable fellows than his companion; and yet this charming companion meditated his, Greville's murder; and had already proposed to his wife, and talked to her of her widowhood. Meanwhile, even as he rode along full of deceit, and most hopeful for the future, Kathleen's thoughts had taken a turn which he had not foreseen—his conceit forbade it. She was willing to share deceit, murder, and all wickedness; but a woman's feeling, inexpressible, and yet irresistible awoke within her; it was certainly not modesty, not delicacy, not sensibility. If it had been anyone else, a mere stranger, or one she merely despised, she might joyfully have married him, and their plans gone on well; but Reily! there was something in his manner, in his character—a chill—not a lack of courage, but no true manliness—a snake-like look; a serpent's

meanness; his blood must certainly have a fishlike coldness—and as once again his proposal that she should become his wife struck on her memory, she unwittingly shuddered. She asked not herself her reason, but she shuddered. A determination came to her heart that no power, no ambition should ever doom her to be Reily's wife. This determination at once became so strong, so powerful, that even from the beginning nothing could remove it. To her it was a comfort, and was like an escape from some great misfortune. She arose and looked at her watch, and was surprised at the lateness of the hour. She had passed a long time in her meditation, she had only just regained her room, when she heard the return of Greville and Reily. She smiled and admired her beautiful teeth as she gazed on them reflected by the mirror. She smiled, for her future conduct was settled; she smiled as she thought of the two fools just returned—What puppets they were in her hands. She went down and joined them at lunch; when they all met in joy, and good temper, and frittered away an hour in admirable humour and wit, so much so, that they all separated with regret; all save one, and this person was Ethel Beal. Now Ethel Beal had seen

much of the world, had been an orphan from early youth, was possessed of exquisite talents and accuteness; and from education, but still much more from her innate goodness had an inseparable dislike to all falseness, and to all wickedness, and this dislike had been cultivated, so that she almost intuitively recognised the presence of deceit, and a lie spoken, rang in her ear no uncertain sound. She left the luncheon party with a sense of relief, such as she might have felt at having escaped from a den of vipers. Once in her own room she threw herself into a large arm-chair, and was lost in wonderment how a man like her uncle could welcome and entertain such people. Much as she had always disliked them, never before had they appeared so glaringly wicked and unprincipled.

‘They are thieves and murderers,’ she said to herself, ‘we are not safe, while they are here; they might poison my uncle, and rob him, or steal his papers and ruin him. How they hate one another, even while they smile.’

She arose and hastened to her uncle’s room. She was very sad. She knew the danger in which he lay, and almost despaired of his life. She cast her ideas rapidly for-

ward, and contemplated all that might happen if he died. She herself, she considered safe ; and yet all her affairs had never been out of her uncle's hands, and he alone must know their exact state ; even in this she was in doubt, how get information ? Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn always acted for her uncle's private affairs ; and so far as she knew, also for the firm ; but of these very lawyers, she had long since decided, that they were rogues, whose souls knew no good, no God, save mammon, whose love was only towards the rich man, in whom was no trustworthiness. While thus thinking she stood by the bed gazing on her uncle, and even as she gazed with a daughter's love, his eyes opened and turned towards her with trust and kindness. She said softly and sweetly,

‘I am anxious about your affairs, uncle, and wish you to trust in me. You have now been ill for some time, so tell me where are your papers, in order that I may see to their safety ; and just consider, are there not some letters that should be written, either as answers or for inquiry.’

‘My most valuable papers are in the iron chest ; its weight and bulk keep it safely. I have letters in the library table drawers ;

read them, and answer them or not, and in your own way, even as you think best. There are my keys, do not let them out of your sight. That will do for to-day. I cannot think, the mere effort wearies me.'

'One word more. Is that iron chest in the library?'

'It is, Ethel, dear. Ah! what pleasure renewed health will be!'

Ethel saw to all her uncle's wants and wishes, and for a long time sat by his bedside holding his hand. She could not leave him, for well she knew the great comfort this was to him; and (excepting alone the love and peace of God) there is no greater comfort to the really sick, and also to the dying, than the pressure of a loving hand. At last, the quiet of his room, and the fresh evening air, slightly loaded with the scent of flowers, brought the luxury of sleep. Presently she withdrew her hand and, leaving him to the care of his well-chosen nurse, hastened to the library. She entered, and, while pausing on the recollection of how often she had there passed many a pleasant hour, either with her uncle, or otherwise, she in vain let her eyes wander in search of the iron chest. The iron chest was not there! She rang the bell, and

desired to have the butler sent up ; he, to her inquiries, assured her that he also was surprised that the chest was not in its usual place ; the head-housemaid was summoned, and she plainly said that it was long since the chest had been taken away : but whether before or after Mr Beal's accident she could not say. There was doubt, as to how or when, but the one thing certain was that the chest was gone. Ethel let the servants retire, and then opened the table drawer, it was half-full of letters ; these she read, folded, wrote the dates and notes of contents on the ends, and tied them together, month by month. The shades of evening had come, so having replaced all letters and other papers, she took counsel with herself, as to her proceedings, first, as to the iron chest, and next, as to replying to several business letters. The chest was not there, it was plain that it had not been carried to some other part of the house, it was simply gone, and as to how or when, there was no trace, no clue.

‘ Oh, these horrible people ; they would rob the house of anything ! ’

Having written their names on a slip of paper, she carefully and regularly considered each and every guest in rotation. The others

she saw reason to acquit, and scratched their names off the roll ; but she long sat in judgment over the names of Mr Greville and Mr Reily. To her, both appeared capable of the theft. From probabilities she went to time and circumstances, and soon, much against her will, she saw that when, according to the housemaid's evidence, the chest had been stolen, Mr Greville had not been at the Manor. Reily's name alone remained. Across her soul came the darkness of doubt and apprehension—apprehension, not fear, for she knew not fear ; she might feel timidity, but never a cowardice. Was not this Reily the intimate ally, and apparently adviser, of Mr Greville ? And was she not well aware of Greville's ill-concealed hatred towards her and her uncle ? She had that very day sat at the mid-day meal, and listened with disgust to the conversation of all ; but in that synagogue of sin and folly, the words of Reily were the meanest ; he had scoffed at all good ; he had praised all wickedness ; his choicest anecdote had been a joke on the downfall of high principle ; his admiration had pointed to successful villany ; let his words be weighed, their import sifted, and not one grain of noble sentiment would

be found therein ; and this man had freedom to come and to go, to use her uncle's house as his own. Her further consideration was interrupted ; a carriage had driven to the door, the hall-bell had rung, and she, with a sense of relief hurried to meet her friend the medical man, Mr Crofts. She met him on the stairs and led him to her sanctum, then and there she consulted and told him her wishes.

‘ And when my uncle had finished his few words, I waited until he slept, and then immediately went to the library ; I at once perceived that the iron chest had been removed, the papers in the drawer appeared to be untouched. I inquired of servants, I have thought it over and over and the only conviction that I have come to is, that a Mr Reily, who is now here, is quite capable of the theft ; but I have no proof. Still it were well to get rid of Mr Reily ; you, Mr Crofts can easily do it ; say, that the house must be completely quiet. Then there arises the question about Mr and Mrs Greville.’

‘ Might I suggest ? ’ said Mr Crofts, ‘ that while I fully approve of getting rid of Mr Reily, we had better keep Mr and Mrs Greville here for a time. The presence of

a gentleman has always its influence on a large establishment like this; he and his wife prevent idleness by the mere fact that they keep up the habitual routine; and Mr Greville might be of use in any serious termination to your uncle's illness. I will immediately see Mr Reily, and politely get rid of him.'

Mr Crofts went straight to the library, where the servants had informed him that he would find the gentlemen. Of course the first inquiry was, 'how is our dear friend, Mr Beal?'

To this Mr Crofts answered, 'Not so well as I could wish, he does not make the progress which I have expected.'

'We are very sorry to hear it,' said Mr Reily.

'So am I,' continued the doctor, 'for many reasons, and one reason is that I find I must interfere with the charming intercourse of the guests now here.'

'If it will help his recovery, we will go at once.'

'No, Mr Reily, not all at once. I have thought it over, and as I know that Mr Beal likes the idea of still having some guests here, I consider it best that their number

should be diminished, not removed altogether. As you are so kind as to volunteer the departure, should I be asking too great a favour, Mr Reily, if you would kindly bid us farewell to-morrow. I know that Mr and Miss Beal will regret it, but believe me, it is a sad necessity.'

'I and Mr Greville have intended a run up to town; this we will now do, and I shall perhaps delay my return; it must depend on circumstances.'

'A suitable arrangement,' added the doctor, 'it is the very thing, and so let it be. Now I must visit Mr Beal. Good-evening, gentlemen.'

As Mr Crofts left the room, Reily turned to Greville, and while he mentally felt resentment, said smilingly to Greville, 'I do not believe a single word that the old scoundrel has said. He has his own mean reason for wishing me away. His pretty little romance about Mr Beal and his illness, is a "cock-and-a-bull" invention. Still to-morrow will see me again in town, and this covered insult will add double vigour to my revenge on old Beal, and his stupidly-arrogant niece. Hang me if I think she is his niece! I wish I had time, and I would make as nice a piece of

scandal out of the whole affair as the fashionable world could desire ; but one thing at a time. Let us ruin the old villain first, and afterwards we will have a shot at the niece.'

Next day Reily and Greville sent on their luggage, and rode through a beautiful country to a somewhat distant station, where, having left the horses with the groom, they entered the train for town. As the train drew out of the station, Reily said, 'We have got all we can from the Beals ; hang them all ! When we have ruined them we must take possession of their house, and have a series of "jollifications."'

'The sooner the better,' answered Greville ; 'to see his name, even as you promise, in the bankruptcy list, will deserve a libation of champagne ; and I have a notion that his utter ruin will be the destruction also of his niece. What an arrogant creature is she !'

'Hush !' exclaimed Reily, 'not a word more in this public place, true, that we seem alone, but there may be a dwarf under the seat, or the guard outside may know how to listen. Trust me, we are sure of success if we keep our own secret, but the secret must be kept. In the business world our little conspiracy is all right ; but our game

is lost if some fool of a friend, or some ass of a woman should step forward to help them, now that they cannot help themselves. The Beals are down, let us stamp on them.'

'Ah, you are right,' answered Greville, 'but, Reily, it seems almost too good a bit of luck, that all our plans are maturing, just when the two fools are out of the race; one ill, and t'other weeping over him.'

'Right you are,' laughed Reily, 'as I said Good-bye to Mrs Greville, I asked her to be sure to let me know anything that might happen at Knowle Manor. I hope you approve?'

'Highly! down on them in his present state, and all his documents at the bottom of that deep pool, the old fool will be ruined in a month, and dead a week afterwards.'

'Speak gently,' said Reily; 'we will work hard, and with vigorous toil, nothing can save them. Still let us say no more. Did you ever hear the historical truth, how a great Russian nobleman, himself and his party were saved? No! It was thus; and the said nobleman afterwards calculated that it was ten thousand to one against it ever happening; he had moreover carefully inquired into all the accidents that had saved

him. It was thus. His bitter enemy was engaged in an interview with the emperor; this enemy had persuaded his sovereign, before whom lay the order, signed and sealed, for the great nobleman's deportation to Siberia, while this very man himself waited on impatiently in a distant chamber. There were five large rooms between him and his bitter enemy. The emperor rose and held the order towards his companion; at that very moment an earthquake shook the palace, the five doors between the great nobleman and the emperor's audience room, flew open; a strong gust of wind arose and swept through the palace, and the order for the deportation to Siberia, lay at the victim's feet. Another shock came, the doors shut, the guards and attendants rushed in, and confusion reigned. In due time all order was restored, and an usher according to his usual duty visited the waiting-rooms, to see if perchance someone waited for an audience. The great nobleman alone was there. He was ushered to the presence; he knelt before the emperor, and holding out the document, exclaimed; "My devotion and obedience bid me bow to my own destruction.

I might have escaped, but I have trusted to the constant justice of a kind master."

'The Emperor seized and read the document with surprise; his first feeling was anger, "How got you this?" but the nobleman explained, "How it was the will of God!"

"It is the will of God!" exclaimed the Emperor, "and his will is mine, rise, and tell me all, you shall not only have justice, but kindness."

'I need scarcely add, that he kept his power and his position. So Greville, not a word more, we never know how our words or deeds may come to an enemy's ears. I am sleepy.'

Reily was right; although he never suspected that every word they had spoken had reached the hearing of a friend devoted to the Beals. When Reily had been about to enter the railway carriage, he had let his eyes search the next compartment; it appeared to be empty; so Reily scarcely heeded, although he saw that the lamp between the two compartments was not in its usual place, and in fact left a hole in the upper part of the well-cushioned division. His usual caution would have kept him silent, but Greville, with the

carelessness of a rich man, talked on, and the few words spoken, by Reily especially, had mentioned the Beals. Half-asleep and somewhat dusty from a long walk, a tall man lay on the unencumbered seat of that apparently empty compartment; the stoppage at the station had made him wide-awake. As the train again went on, he turned round for another rest, when Reily's first exclamation thoroughly aroused him. He listened and moved not; every word spoken by Reily and Greville reached him; their names were mentioned by themselves, but still the man determined not only to see them, but to know their places of abode. It was night when they arrived in town; the train had scarcely stopped when the tall man sprang out, and one of the officials reprimanded him for leaving the train before it was completely at a standstill. He went back into the darker part of the platform, and waited patiently; a man-servant and a porter soon transferred the luggage to a private carriage; and the stranger perceived that the two gentlemen were about to enter it. He immediately ran to a hansom cab; it was already engaged, and every cab on the station had been reserved by someone. The Greville carriage

drove off; he sprang forward and kept pace with it, hoping every second to meet some empty cab. The carriage soon turned out of the thronged thoroughfares, and was driven along large deserted streets; but the tall man did not desist in his race until the carriage drew up, and Greville, with Reily, descended at the former's mansion. The tall man was left alone in the deserted streets. He walked across the road, and in order to make assurance doubly sure, he would not trust his memory, but wrote down the number of the house, and even the name of the crescent, although he knew it well; he slowly withdrew, pondering what were the best steps to take so as to countermine all the villany he had overheard. He reached a large and handsome Queen Anne mansion, drew a latch-key from his pocket; the door yielded, he walked upstairs, turned to a familiar room, and ere he retired to rest, not only returned thanks for all things, but especially that he had become cognizant of the revenge and mischief intended to be wrought on Mr Beal and his niece Ethel.

Next morning the two allies, Reily and Greville, arose, but not early—Greville went in for all the luxuries his wealth could give

him, of which Reily also was not unwilling to partake. The late and well-chosen breakfast wasted time ; but it mattered not, their plans were arranged and set ; money at their command, and no one seemingly to oppose them, even their pursuit of revenge was a luxury, it not only gratified their evil passions, but gave them the pleasure of conquest, stimulated their energies, and pleasingly to them, unfolded the villany of mankind. Long ere they had left their couches, Warren Knowles was at work. Even while he dressed and breakfasted, his only thought was how to protect Ethel, and, for her dear sake, her uncle. By the time he had arrived at his friendly lawyer, he had up to a certain point, mentally worked out, by what means a business man might be ruined, not in the usual way of trade, but by villany, and malice aforethought. After the courtesies and conversational interlude, Knowles' question was, 'How can a business man be ruined, even when he has plenty of money ?'

'Really, Mr Knowles, this is rather a difficult affair ?'

'Think again,' said Knowles, 'for I have carefully considered it. Money no object, how many difficulties disappear.'

‘True, Mr Knowles, but even if money were no object, there must be time, these things cannot be done in a hurry.’

‘But granting plenty of time, and a heap of money, what then?’

‘Then it might be done, but if the opposite party has also plenty of means, then the blow should be sudden. It should be hit hard, and hit quickly. Time is often power.’

‘Just so,’ continued Knowles, ‘but in the case which I shall lay before you, time has been used; all the preliminaries have long ago been settled; the only counterblast to this conspiracy (for conspiracy it is,) is my knowledge of it; it only came to my ears yesterday, accidentally, and in it I have no hand; to-day I am with you, and we must act quickly and cunningly. Now for the whole affair, names and all. Remember, we are to spare neither money, time, nor labour, my object is to frustrate a villain’s plot against an innocent man; and even now we may be too late. First of all, my opponents are a Mr Greville and a Mr John Reily, both rich men and unscrupulous. I have every reason to be certain that they began this little game of cruel vengeance a considerable while now past, in fact I know it.

I am merely a friend of him who is to be ruined; and if necessary, shall throw all I have into the whirlpool; although I consider we can save him and his, and run no risk.'

'I should like to know your friend's name; nothing like names and dates; these are the true foundation of all business.'

'My friend's name is Beal—Mr William Beal—a London merchant and banker, and nearly everything that makes money.'

'Mr Beal,' exclaimed the lawyer, 'it is impossible! Why, the Bank of England, the National Credit, and Mr Beal, are all looked on as on a par, and equally safe.'

'Nevertheless, Mr Beal is the man. Messrs Greville and Reily have already done so much, that they consider his bankruptcy a certainty, provided (as one of them said) "no fool of a friend or ass of a woman interferes."'

'So far, so bad. Now, do let me hear the *per contra*, or, in other words, what have you, or anyone else, done to avert such a catastrophe?'

'First of all, Reily and Greville believe—in fact, are absolutely sure—that Mr Beal's most valuable deeds and documents have been destroyed; for example, Mr Beal

holds a heavy mortgage on my estate. He had in his possession the mortgage and all the title-deeds; these Greville and Reily believe to be destroyed, so that it would take a long time, and great trouble, if he wished to call in his money and I opposed him. Now, as for the *per contra*. I have been able to save these very documents, and a great many more, from destruction, and I now have them in my possession here in London.'

'And,' added the lawyer, 'in all probability, on this very account, the balance is in our favour. What more?'

'That not only have I the mortgage money ready, but a long sum besides, and whatever these villains do we must be prepared to undo.'

'You may depend upon it,' said the lawyer, 'that these gentlemen have bought up heaps of his debts, and will come down on Mr Beal for payment suddenly, and at the right moment.'

'I am sorry to say,' said Knowles, 'that Mr Beal has met with an accident, which renders him unfit for any business whatsoever, and must keep him useless for some time to come. This is well known to the others, and they mean to act on it—in fact, they call it a

piece of luck on their side, and all goes well with them. The only thing they fear is, as I before said, that some fool of a friend might interfere.'

'Your opponents seem to be clever men. They will be difficult to thwart, still money is a very powerful instrument, and with its help we can do much. Let me see.' said the lawyer, as he looked at his watch, 'the day is young, the first thing that we must do is to make sure that the needful money is quite handy, and not only nominally at call, but really ready to be used at once. We must negotiate through your bankers, so that without selling out, or making our requisitions depend on time, we can act at once and pay any debt, and meet all demands. Do you know how far our opponents have gone?'

'No, I do not, but depend on it all is prepared. Their very words that "Beal must be a bankrupt, unless some fool of a friend interferes," show that all is ready. Can you suggest our line of fire?'

'Two things, if possible, we will settle this very day; first, we will see your bankers, so as to command money almost on demand. I presume they know something about your

affairs, estates, and so on ; for if they do, it will save much talk and waste of time. Secondly, I—or perhaps even we—will have a chat with the manager of Mr Beal's bank ; and here, I fear, we must be explicit. What I wish to establish is confidence between us and them ; so that when our opponents do make their masked attack, we shall be ready to thwart them with a flank surprise, supported by the heavy artillery of pounds, shillings, and pence. In order to do this, the bank manager must give us immediate notice of what, in our case, is being done. Now, we will take a hansom and off to Messrs Smith, Jones, Doubleham, & Co.'

On arrival, they were shown to the private room ; and although some caution and frigidity were at first shown, the name of Warren Knowles, of Knowle Manor, acted like sun on the mountain-tops ; the ice gradually melted, and streams of riches might have been poured forth, but Mr Gordonson the lawyer in concise terms, clearly explained everything, and when he (Warren Knowles) left the bank, all had been arranged as they desired, and Mr Gordonson congratulated his companion on his money arrangements, and good credit ; ' It is a pleasure to act for and

with a man of the world ; Ah ! few but a lawyer can know the misery and anxiety to have to deal with a fool, or a person of strong prejudices—they both call themselves men of firmness, men who can take care of themselves, they generally die friendless, and oftentimes leave trouble to their children, and of which they had never dreamed. Ah ! here we are at Mr Beal's bank.' They entered, and desired an interview with the manager. 'We are come to arrange about some outstanding debts, so before we go into business, I had better state, that I am Mr Gordonson, of the firm of Gordonson, Cumming & Co., solicitors, and this is my client Mr Knowles.'

'Oh,' answered the manager, 'you are Mr Gordonson, solicitor, and this is your client, Mr Knowles ; very good, exactly so !'

'Thank you, Mr Barkings,' answered the lawyer, 'for your kindness.'

'Oh,' continued the manager, 'my kindness ! very good, exactly so !'

'Yes,' answered the lawyer ; 'our business is rather particular, I may say not in the usual way of trade.'

'Oh, not in the usual way of trade ! very good, exactly so !'

‘I presume,’ again said the lawyer, ‘that you have the full confidence of Mr Beal?’

‘Yes, I have; yes, his full confidence.’

‘So, may I introduce you to Mr Warren Knowles, who, together with his father, are owners of Knowle Manor estate, and have as their tenant, your principal, Mr Beal.’

‘Oh,’ reiterated again Mr Barkings, the manager, ‘very good, exactly so!’

‘And Mr Knowles takes great interest in the Beal family, and much regrets to find that Mr Beal has had an accident, and is in some danger; I trust that you have better news about him?’

‘Yes,’ answered Mr Barkings, to whom this was the first intimation of Mr Beal’s serious state; ‘he is better, not so serious as it appears.’

‘My client, Mr Knowles, has lately been down to Knowle Manor, and he reports Mr Beal as being unfit for business, in fact he has seen the medical man, so on this subject has the latest information.’

‘Oh!’ answered Mr Barkings, ‘very good, exactly so.’

‘Exactly so, Mr Barkings,’ answered the lawyer, ‘and so far, so good. Now understand, we are not come to talk to you about any

debt belonging to Mr Knowles, but about some possible difficulties of Mr Beal ; I say, possible difficulties, not actual difficulties.'

'Gentlemen,' answered Mr Barkings, 'possible difficulties may occur ; but Mr Beal has such insight and foresight into business that difficulties, possible to other men, are not likely to happen to him. All our affairs are on such a footing that there is very little possibility of a difficulty.'

'Permit me to say that my client, Mr Knowles is a man of unlimited wealth, has a great esteem for your principal, Mr Beal, and knowing how ill he is, and being also well aware how he manages by himself alone all his own great affairs, has been induced by his knowledge and private information, to dread, lest some most unexpected demand for large, really large sums of money might be made on Mr Beal ; while Mr Beal is too ill to look to this himself, or even to instruct someone else how to meet the demands. Mr Knowles, therefore, through me, is willing to meet any liability which may attack Mr Beal while he is ill, and thus unable personally to arrange it.'

Mr Barkings, the manager, pushed his spectacles up on to his forehead, took up a

pen, and looked at the nib; replaced the pen in its former place, not hurriedly, but calmly and deliberately; and then, in a firm and decided tone, uttered,

‘Very good! Exactly so!’

‘I am glad that you see it in its proper light,’ replied the lawyer; ‘and it all comes to this, that these bills, or debts, may or may not be presented. If they are not presented for payment, there is an end of the whole affair; but if they are presented it would be a very serious affair, not to say a bankruptcy, unless the money were forthcoming. Now my idea, and Mr Knowles’ information, point to a case of non-payment, provided this happens while Mr Beal is ill in bed, and totally unable to go into any business whatsoever. What, therefore, we wish you to do is, on receipt of anything unpleasant, to apply to us. I now give you Mr Knowles’ address in town, and also mine. Remember, all we wish you to do is to prevent difficulties while Mr Beal is too ill to right them; so I suppose we can depend on you to apply to us on the first unexpected application, and also on any other subsequent one which may occur.’

Mr Barkings looked at first suspicious,

then an expression of surprise passed over his countenance, until at last the habits of business seemed to resume their sway, and he said,

‘What security will you require?’

‘Merely a proper and formal receipt—the usual business receipt.’

‘What about interest? We cannot allow anything beyond two-and-a-half per cent. per annum.’

‘You will state that interest, in the receipt, to be paid half-yearly, and six months’ notice to be given for repayment of capital. Does this satisfy you?’

‘Very good! very good!’ exclaimed Barkings; ‘exactly so!’

‘Please now to let us know if you understand what we require?’

‘Perfectly—two-and-a-half’——

‘No, no, Mr Barkings; that is all settled. What I wish to know is, that you understand that you must apply to us.’

‘Exactly so,’ replied the manager; ‘I shall apply to you, one or both, the very moment any difficulty occurs which we cannot fully and at once meet; but we do not expect it.’

‘Ah, Mr Barkings, security is man’s worst

enemy ; the demand will come, believe me ; nothing but a miracle can avert it.'

Mr Knowles and the solicitor took their leave ; they left Mr Barkings lost in wonderment. He read their addresses several times ; called for the Post Office Directory ; he turned to the firm of Messrs Gordonson, Cumming, & Co, read it more than once, then putting on his hat he hastened to the firm of solicitors who generally advised the bank. Their assurance was that Mr Gordonson was a first-rate solicitor, and the firm held in high and well-known repute. So Mr Barkings returned to his business table, and resumed his usual routine of work. Even as Knowles reached his chambers, Reily left his comfortable club and strolled to the offices of Messrs Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn. He was received by Mr Lyall with great respect, not only was he rich, but he was the ally of the proverbially wealthy Mr Greville ; moreover Mr Lyall had (as the uneducated often say) ' Seen the colour of his money,' and that colour was of a pleasing yellow.

'I trust, Mr Lyall, that our business is nearly worked up? that we have at last drawn together sufficient of his outstanding

liabilities to cut old Beal clear out of everything.'

'Yes,' answered Mr Lyall, 'all is ripe. We have nearly negociated the purchase of one and the last, and then we will swoop on Mr Beal with the suddenness and precision of a goshawk.'

'Aye!' said Reily, 'pluck him at once, and leave his carcase to the crows! When will it be?'

'Every moment I expect the finish.'

'Remember,' said Reily, 'Greville must have a hand in everything. Let him come here—in fact I will bring him, and we must get up a little scene, just to give him an extra pleasure; we must regret, or rather you and I must pretend to regret that all is not ready; and just as we are bewailing the delay, let the last stone, the keystone of our arch, be added. I mean, while we regret, let your clerk come in, and lay a document before you, then you will read, and springing up with joy, exclaim,

'This is victory, and Mr Beal is ruined. You will show the document—and mind it is the real document—so that Greville may truly rejoice. We will once again have a talk, and then act through our agent. Send

all the liabilities to Beal's bank, and wait impatiently for the smash. We must get and keep Greville in good humour, so that he may bleed freely through the pocket.'

'A very good idea, Mr Reily; but why not do all on this very day? You expect Mr Greville; good! just take an arm-chair, and I will slip out and see if all this cannot be done at once. If on my return I find Mr Greville here, you will understand by my words, to wit: "I have just settled a little business outside," that all is right, and then you and I can play the little game.'

Mr Lyall went away, and ere he returned, Greville was with Reily in the inner office. Reily at once expressed his regret at the slightest delay; and showed how it might interfere with, and perhaps prevent their revenge, if old Beal were to die or recover.

'We must act at once; all delays are most dangerous; moreover, we must find means to let old Beal know that he is a bankrupt. A letter would not do; that Maypole niece of his would intercept it. The only plan that I can hit on is to hire a bailiff, and lawfully, or unlawfully, let him, by fair or foul means, get into Beal's room, and serve him a writ; leave with him a list of what we had claimed;

and show him how, by non-payment, he is declared a bankrupt; right or wrong, it will kill him, and so you will have a double revenge, and receive the reward of all your trouble and expense twice over. We should go down to his funeral, and have a real jollification on our return to his house. Drinking his champagne and eating his venison as our reward for having killed him, is really a glorious idea! By Jove, it is a magnificent idea!

‘Too good to be true,’ said Greville; ‘we must push on this, Lyall, and get it done; work it through, step by step; and if we can, go in for the double event.’

‘You are always right,’ laughed Reily. ‘Here comes the devil’s henchman; let us hope that he brings good news. Good-day, Mr Lyall.’

‘Good-day, gentlemen. I trust you will excuse my absence; I have just settled a little business outside, and am now at your command.’

‘We wish,’ said Mr Greville, ‘to act at once; now is the time, not only to make Beal a bankrupt, but to kill him by the news of it. Is all ready?’

‘All but one very large claim; I have

long expected it here, but, alas ! have as yet been totally disappointed.'

'Can we not act without it?'

'No, impossible ; it leaves a risk of failure. Mr Beal is not only very rich, but his credit is enormous. If we get this last liability into our possession, the attack will be irresistible. We must wait.'

'I do not approve of this delay,' added Reily ; 'we were just saying how dangerous it is. Suppose Mr Beal were to die or recover, all our labour and expense might be in vain ; and we lose the great pleasure to which we have looked forward.'

'Yes,' said Greville, 'now or never !'

Just as the words were spoken, a knock was given at the door, and to Mr Lyall's 'Come in' there entered the chief clerk, laid a document before the solicitor, and retired. Lyall opened and read, or seemed to read, the first few lines—then he started up, exclaiming,

'Mr Greville, let me congratulate you ; Mr Beal is as good as a bankrupt ; this document makes the last of his liabilities ours ; now we can act, and on this very day. Of course I have your authority to see that our agent proceeds with it, and acting strictly

according to law, hurries on everything to the bankruptcy. The game is a sure one. No delay! No mercy!’

‘Well said, Mr Lyall,’ continued Reily, ‘it will be, nay, it is a victory. Come along, Greville, and let us leave Lyall free to do his duty.’

Greville and Reily were duly bowed out, when as they strolled homewards, Reily said, ‘How well our secret has been kept, really luck is ours. If our intention had oozed out, some fool, or some cunning hand would most certainly have interfered and bought up these liabilities; now everything is quiet, no one has crossed our path. We will have a cheerful dinner, and to-morrow get Lyall to report progress; it will be interesting. By the bye, what a double game that fellow has been playing. Family adviser to Beal, and working with us by every means lawful and unlawful, in order to ruin him. Do you remember Warren Knowles of the Guards?’

‘Yes,’ answered Greville; ‘I do; he and I never got on well together, but they liked him and were very sorry when he came to grief.’

‘Well,’ said Reily; ‘he is a lucky man,

and we have most unintentionally worked in his favour. When we stole and cast that iron chest into the miller's pool ; depend on it Beal's mortgage on Knowle Manor was in it, and if so, provided Knowles has any sense in him he will manage to wriggle out of this mortgage. I wonder what he will do ? for Beal's bankruptcy will show all this, it will be a " Nine days' wonder." "

'It matters not,' said Greville. 'When the uncle is gone, and had a good smash, I should much like to play some ugly turn against the niece. If she is ruined together with her uncle, it will be a run of good luck ; but if she comes out all right how can we manage to forestall her future, and reduce her to beggary ?'

'I tell you what it is,' suggested Reily ; 'the chances are that she and nunky fall together, and if not, we must wait the event, and then, if need be, begin again.'

'I hate delay,' said Greville. 'Come upstairs for a game at billiards ; and so to dinner.'

Meanwhile Mr Lyall instructed the agent in all his duties, gave him a list of liabilities, and impressed on him that no one belonging

to the firm of Lyall, Synkmore, and Wynn should be mentioned.

In due course the agent returned and gave an account of his proceedings, and consequently Greville, just as he, Reily, and a few other chosen guests sat down to dinner, received the following note :—

‘DEAR SIR,—According to your instructions, our agent this day callad at Mr Beal’s bank, and handed to the manager, Mr Barkings, a list of his liabilities, and requested payment. Mr Barkings read the list, which he retains, he expressed no surprise ; and said that on presentation of the proper papers the debts would be discharged ; and appointed twelve o’clock to-morrow for the payment ; the parties to meet at Mr Beal’s bank. This looks well for us ; if he had been prepared, he would never have put off the settlement to another day. May I request that you and Mr Reily will do me the honour of calling at my office to-morrow, say at three o’clock p.m. precisely ; and I remain, my dear sir, yours obediently

‘J. LYALL.’

‘Read that,’ said Greville, as he threw

the letter across to Reily, 'is it good or bad?'

'Oh, good in every way. A woman who hesitates is lost, and so is a debtor. If dinner were over, I should drink your correspondent's health; as it is, I wish him all luck. Trust me, Greville, the devil himself could not have played our little game better, than has the "Devil's Henchman," that nickname is really apt.'

The hours swept by. London, with all its joys, miseries, sins, and kindnesses, rioted, slept, or prayed. Morning came, and Mr Barkings presented himself at the Queen Anne's Mansion. At the mention of his name the hall porter admitted him; he was, undoubtedly, an expected visitor. Mr Knowles received him almost like an old friend; and (as Mr Barkings afterwards said in confidence to his head-clerk) seemed quite overjoyed at parting with so much money.

'Sit down,' he said; 'take some breakfast. Anyone belonging to Mr Beal is most welcome here.'

'Thank you,' answered Mr Barkings, 'business first, and pleasure afterwards. Believe me, unexpected delays often happen; so let us at once see your solicitor, Mr Gor-

donson, and do what we can ; for yesterday afternoon, just before the closing of the bank, claims for debt amounting to the whole of our liabilities were presented for immediate payment, and in strict business form. During nearly the whole of last night I carefully and anxiously examined into every possible resource by which ready-money in cash could be obtained, either as due or advanced to the credit of the name of our well-known bank, and found that with the utmost exertion we can cover only two-thirds of the demand, and that this uncovered third must be forth-coming by twelve o'clock to-day, or Mr Beal's name will assuredly, before twenty-four hours, be posted as a bankrupt; there are the figures, Mr Knowles : cast your eye over them, and see the whole affair.'

'Good !' said Knowles, after he had read the account, 'good !' he said, with ill-suppressed joy ; 'that amount I can supply. Let us go at once, Mr Barkings ; a hansom cab will soon take us there.'

Mr Gordonson was at home, and as the great clock at Westminster struck ten, he and Knowles and Mr Barkings entered the bank of Messrs Smith, Jones, and Doubleham. A wealthy man can command fabulous sums,

while the one really in want cannot get any thing ; so Knowles soon had the pleasure of putting Mr Barkings in possession of the heavy sum required. Mr Gordonson then pleaded engagements, and left them ; but Knowles determined to see the meeting at Mr Beal's bank, and to mark all that happened. Mr Barkings agreed to his wishes, and expressed his opinion that it was a business-like move.

‘You shall have a seat and table in our private room, and if occupied with pens, ink, and paper, no one will heed your presence. Ah ! here we are ; it will soon be twelve, and we have everything ready. Sit down and write, or the other parties will consider you a spy, or something not correct ; and I hope, Mr Knowles, that you will actually write, and so be busy.’

In due time, even as the clock struck twelve, the agent and a solicitor entered, his clerk carried a blue bag. There was a hard look about all three that promised no compromise. They looked like men bent on an action, which they knew to be disagreeable, and are resolved to go through with it without yielding an inch. The agent produced the documents required, and while

he and his companions remained seated and in silence, Mr Barkings examined the list, and then the documents. At last he uttered, 'Quite correct.' Perhaps on purpose, perhaps accidentally, he paused, and Knowles remarked, how unbending and attentive the others were. 'Gentlemen,' continued Mr Barkings, 'I must have a separate receipt for each liability, as Mr Beal is not here, in fact he is ill and in the country.'

The others bowed, and Knowles could not help thinking that there was a look of doubt, of even distrust on their countenances. They were visibly waiting for Mr Barkings' announcement, that payment could not be made.

'Ahem!' again began Mr Barkings, and again the others all looked at him; no doubt more assured than ever of his sad announcement of inability to pay. 'Ahem!' continued he; 'I say gentlemen; ahem, you must excuse my cough, and gentlemen; ahem!'

'Mr Barkings,' said the agent; we are come here for payment of certain demands, and we must have a definite answer; will you meet these liabilities, or will you not?'

'Gentlemen,' said Mr Barkings, 'The first liability on the list, is to certain parties—I need not go into it, for ten thousand, five

hundred, and fifteen pounds, seven shillings, and sixpence. Here is payment in full. Just see that it is correct, and hand me the receipt, together with the documents connected with it.'

There was a slight hesitation, and the agent looked to the monies, referred for a few seconds to the solicitor, signed the receipt, and passed it with the other documents to Mr Barkings. The same process was gone through many times until the entire list was ended. At last the agent, solicitor, and clerk rose, they hesitated for a moment; wished Mr Barkings 'Good-day,' and went away. The manager kept the door of his private-room open, and watched their departure. Even as the outer-door swung noiselessly on its hinges, he closed his private-room, and walked straight up to Knowles, seized his hand, and shook it; then, taking out his handkerchief, he rubbed his head and forehead; the perspiration was actually running down.

'I could not have borne it for five minutes longer. Mr Knowles, we owe you an eternal debt of gratitude. As to the money, you cannot lose a halfpenny; but to imagine that any man, any set of men, could have planned Mr Beal's bankruptcy and ruin, it is beyond

me. Yesterday, when you left me, I telegraphed to Mr Beal; here is the telegram answer—"Mr Beal too ill for business; he must be kept quite quiet." I can only say it is wonderful! I did not believe it—no, not a word. I apologise, Mr Knowles; I apologise. Even this morning I still looked to some attempt at some enormous swindle; but our visit to your bankers changed my ideas; there, with the Messrs Smith, Jones, and Doubleham, there could be no mistake; you and your credit was a solid fact; and only just in time, sir. Sir, are you a relation or connection of Mr Beal?'

'No,' answered Knowles, laughingly, 'No, Mr Barkings, not the most distantly. At present you can scarcely guess why I take so great an interest in him and his affairs. An accident gave me the information, on which I acted, I knew, of a certainty, that every effort would be made to ruin Mr Beal, fortunately I had plenty of money in hand. You have escaped a great danger.'

'We have, sir, just so! I may say that we should have been bankrupts in the midst of great wealth. It is wonderful, we are safe now I know, but although the danger is past, I am getting more anxious and alarmed

every moment, really I feel quite ill. It is dreadful.'

'Not a bit of it,' exclaimed Knowles kindly, 'put your hat on and come out, lunch is the best remedy, where shall we go?'

'Very good,' said the manager, 'very good, exactly so. Lunch! I feel comfort at the very sound of the word. I will show you the way—but only to think!'

'Think not at all, or all your ugly feelings will come back; let us eat, and, like soldiers, thank God for all his mercies; they are great.'

'Amen,' said Barkings, 'very good, exactly so!'

Three o'clock struck, and Mr Lyall courteously received Greville and Reily.

'Egad!' exclaimed Greville; 'I feel like a man who has landed a large salmon after an exciting struggle. I hope you have taken the necessary steps to make the bankruptcy final. Really I did not think that there was so much pleasure left on earth. Hate must be a fine thing to live on!'

'Everything,' answered Lyall — 'everything is going on well. Although I cannot give you the exact state, I have the papers in another room, also the agent's account; in a short time I will send it to you, and all

and everything connected with to-day's transaction.'

'Ah,' spoke Greville, 'I should like to have seen the manager's face when these liabilities were placed before him. You say that all as-yet goes well? I shall be greatly rejoiced when all is safe. I had imagined that a day would have done the work; but I suppose it is usual a day's work by promise means at least a week by experience. Hang it! I hate delay.'

'So do I,' said Reily, 'but I have learnt to be patient. I think we had better bid Mr Lyall Good-day, and seek the pleasures of the West End; then, although old Beal is as yet neither bankrupt nor dead, we can nevertheless eat a good dinner and drink to his undoing.'

Reily and Greville departed, content, but not satisfied. They both longed to drink the cup of hatred to the dregs; but like wise men of the world, in meantime enjoyed the draught they had already tasted. Lyall bowed them out, and then from his window watched them as they walked away.

'Is it even so?' he mentally exclaimed, as he reclined in his habitual arm-chair. 'These two men know that I have betrayed

to them my other client, Mr Beal, and yet they trust me. Mr Beal also trusted me, and at the same time he must have been aware, or should have been aware, that for his interest I was acting against my older clients the Knowles. Strange, but it seems to be a sad necessity that we all must trust someone. False, utterly false, man or woman may be, and yet in him or her someone, from sheer necessity, will be compelled to have confidence. In the inner room are sums of money to almost any amount, in fact all the monies paid us on Mr Beal's account. I wonder how and where he managed to get so much ready-money together at a day's notice. Now I wonder how much out of it I can appropriate? I could certainly take the whole of it and flit, but international arrangements might interfere. Part of it, I certainly might keep back. Let me see? They would be most unwilling to come forward, and let it be perceived that they had conspired to ruin a prosperous merchant. My name can scarcely appear. I have not written a word that can commit me in their conspiracy; in fact I have purposely kept clear. If I took the whole, it would be a risk for them to prosecute me; a portion! If I took only a

part, I might with decent management never even be accused of it. Ah! the best thing I can do is to be content with a little, merely a few thousands; but the whole is a great temptation; so let me look carefully at the documents and the money; it may show me my way more clearly.'

Lyall spent a considerable time in inspecting the bundle of papers, which the agent had left with him; he also carefully counted over the various sums of money, until he had seen that all was most correct, and felt that he was master of the situation. With a full conviction that he was safe, (the result of deep consideration and long practice in the tortuous ways of life) he deliberately put aside a sum of upwards of twelve thousand pounds, these he locked up in his private iron safe, the remainder he placed in a carpet-bag, took it away and paid it into the hands of Mr Greville's banker. He wrote a polite note to Mr Greville, and stated that he had just paid a considerable sum into the bank, and also added that he feared, the vengeance was not quite secure, that Mr Beal's bank had more money in hand than could have been expected, but yet, that with care and some patience, much might

be done. He finally stated, that he himself was just about to start and would be fully engaged during the next fortnight in the country, yet and nevertheless he would not for a moment neglect his (Mr Greville's) business. That night he passed across the channel, and paid into a Paris bank twelve thousand pounds, all in good English bank-notes. He did not delay; he dined, slept, and breakfasted in Paris, and in the afternoon of the same day was once again in England.

CHAPTER II

THE summer sun shone out, and the inmates of Knowle Manor awoke to the duties, pleasures, griefs, and cares of this world. Ethel Beal gently opened the blinds of the room in which her uncle lay, and looked forth on the glorious morn. The birds sang praise to their Maker, and seemed to rejoice in their innocence. A few rabbits played on the lawn, and appeared to be fully aware that they were privileged; while a frightened hare started to its feet and sped away. Ethel gazed on the pleasant scene, and her mind reverted to the days when her uncle was well, and all was joy in the Manor House.

She thought of the rides and quiet walks ; she thought of the Earl of Banbury's ghost, in the person of Mr Warren (otherwise, of course, Warren Knowles) and half-wondered where he could be. Her memory brought back all the meetings in the woods, the adventures by the seaside, his noble rescue of the baby, and above all came the cheering thought, that he was not merely one John Smith, but undoubtedly claimed the name of Warren, for by that name had Sir Charles Stagely welcomed him, and called him a most honest honourable man ; he was also an ex-guardsman, but unfortunate, and at that last thought her heart melted with tenderness, and although she had never shown the least cruelty to him, still she more than half-reproached herself with lack of kindness. Even while she gazed, almost lost in softening memories, a gipsy woman stole out of a shrubbery, and made a signal ; Ethel Beal heeded it not, she continued to look at the beauties of nature, and appreciated how well the red cloak agreed with the various hues of green, and the brown tint of the earth. Still the gipsy repeated her signals, while Ethel scarcely heeded her gestures. At last it suddenly struck her that

to her and for her were intended all the gipsy's action. She raised her hand so as to acknowledge that her attention had been gained; then the gipsy woman, pointing to the door of the mansion, walked noiselessly towards it across the grand drive. Although her toilet was by no means complete, still as no one had yet moved in the house, she merely threw a cloak across her shoulders, and hastened downstairs. She had noticed that her uncle slept, and that all was right in the room. She went across the hall to the door, and bending down, listened. The gipsy knocked lightly, yet distinctly, twice, so Ethel, in mere curiosity, imitated her.

'Madam,' whispered she, 'are you alone?'

Just then Ethel heard the staircase give a slight creak, and being fully aware of her own scantiness of costume, sat herself in the deep recess of a porter's chair and remained perfectly quiet, hoping thereby to escape all discovery, especially as the hall windows were all closed, and curtains and shutters not yet undone. She heard a rustle on the stair, and justly concluded that some woman had come down; she believed it might be a housemaid, and heard her footstep in the hall; the woman's dress brushed the porter's settle as

she passed; and then she drew back the bolts and unlocked the door; but having left the safety-chain still fastened, it opened only a few inches. Again the gipsy woman spoke:

‘Madam, are we safe from all listeners?’

‘Utterly so, speak, what have you to say?’

‘That I have some trace of John Smith.’

‘Ah!’ was the answer, ‘is he not yet dead?’

‘No, my pretty lady, one of our women called at a farm a few miles the other side of the hills, and says that she most undoubtedly saw John Smith. I got the name, and learnt the way, and went over next day, but no John Smith was there. The farmer’s wife denied all knowledge of such a person, but when the dairy-maid came to have her fortune told, I predicted that a tall fair man would win her heart, and take her as his wife, she giggled and blushed, so I knew I was on the right track, and added ‘beware of J. S. he is a dangerous lover, but would make a good husband.’

‘Alas!’ sighed she, ‘he is gone, but it does not matter; for never a word did I ever get out of him; and now I think Thomas Giles far more preferable.’

‘Nevertheless,’ I said, ‘just tell me where

he is, and I will see if he is in love elsewhere, and then you shall have Thomas Giles for your fortune, and a bag of money on your wedding-day.'

'Oh!' exclaimed she, 'he was off this very day—off in the early morning, ere the cows came to be milked; so I neither saw him, nor marked which way he went. He is gone, and that is all I know; but it is nothing to me—I prefer Thomas Giles. Thus you see, my pretty lady, that John Smith must have been there; and if there, then certainly alive and well.'

'It is dangerous to talk here too long,' added the other; 'let us meet at eleven, where the wicket-gate of the flower-garden leads to the woods; be sure to come. I had hoped that John Smith was dead and buried.'

The door was shut, the bolts again shot, the key turned in the lock, and through the darkness of the house the woman went her way, and all was still. A few minutes elapsed, and Ethel left the deep and secure recess of the porter's settle. She stood to listen; not the slightest sound, except the cricket in the hall fire-place. She glided upstairs—with perfect safety, and unseen, regained her uncle's room. She looked

around ; all appeared to be as she had left it ; her uncle's attitude was so completely the same, that she had no hesitation in feeling confident that he had not missed her. She approached the bed, in order to sit in her usual place, and await his wishes and her duties. She looked, and it flashed to her memory that the chair was not where she had left it ; again she considered ; but, no ! there could be no mistake. As she was going from the room, she had said to herself, ' I will leave the chair there in its usual place ; and if he should awake, he will at once understand that I have gone.'

There could be no doubt that the chair had been moved ; but how and by whom, was not only a mystery, but a subject of some alarm ; why and how had anyone penetrated into that room ? She drew the chair back to its usual place, and sat down. Was it possible that she who had descended, and talked with the gipsy, had also visited that room ? This seemed the most probable solution, and no other occurred to her. She let the mystery rest on her memory, so as to seize hereafter on any clue that time might bring. She arose and once again looked out on the morning ; the bright sun now shone ;

a bee winged past, the birds still sang, and the flowers sent up their odour ; a calmness came over her, she reclined on a sofa, and fell into a slight sleep ; she heeded not the entrance of the professional nurse, she dreamed of the ex-guardsman, even in her dream she could not recognize him as a gamekeeper ; she once again seemed to walk in the glade which led from the mansion, and at her side was he of whom she thought ; he was pale and strange, each time she turned to speak his appearance was that of a dead man, but as her voice reached his ear he changed, as if word by word it affected him, and seemed gradually to recall life, she ceased from speaking, and the vital energy died out, and he faded into the appearance of a corpse, she seemed in her dream to become silent, she gazed at him with horror, he held out his hand as if for help, she seized it, he uttered, 'When next I come be kinder, your love alone can save me from this death.' He with these words disappeared, but she felt his hand still in hers, she clasped it, as if his and her life hung on the deed, a chill ran through her, she seemed to hold the hand of a dead man, she struggled in an agony to retain it and awoke, the

darkened room, the quietness, all soon recalled her to herself, she arose and approached her uncle, he was awake and smiled on her. Oh ? what sacrifices she would willingly have made to see him restored to his former health.

‘Uncle, are you better ? You smile at me, just like yourself before the accident occurred.’

‘Come nearer, sweet niece. A strange thing happened to me last night, or early this morning—a dream, and yet it bore all the likeness of reality. It seemed to me as if I awoke and looked for you ; but I at once knew you were not here, for I saw your chair empty. I shut my eyes in order to sleep again, when a man’s voice said, “Are you better or worse ?” It was a sweet voice, and tender. I opened my eyes, and seated much nearer to me than you generally are, was a gentleman. I recognised his countenance, and his voice was familiar to me ; but who he was my memory refused to tell. I answered, “Better, slightly better.” He said, “Let me feel your pulse,” and almost before I could answer he seemed to do so. He gazed at me for a short time ; then he arose, and said in a kind and most

courteous tone, "You shall have a London doctor; your illness has continued too long; leave it to me; I am watching over you." I shut my eyes in doubt whether I was really awake or asleep; again I looked—he was gone! What think you, sweet niece, of this my dream?

'Ah, uncle, we must not believe in dreams. I have also dreamt, and mine was all nonsense. If yours was not a dream, but a reality, we can judge by the future; if a medical man does come from town, not only will it prove that some friend has visited you, but it also gives us an opportunity of hearing his name. I begin to think that your mysterious friend is right, that your illness has gone on for a long while, and that a more experienced man might do you much good. Ah! time will show! Time solves many a difficulty.'

Mr Beal's breakfast was then served, and Ethel superintended it, she amused him, and raised his spirits by her cheerful conversation and soft voice. She told of the early morn and rising sun, of beautiful flowers and sweet scents, of the buzzing of bees and the song of birds, then, as his eyelids closed she let her voice gradually subside, he slept; she arose

and sought her own private apartments. There while she watched the pheasants and the playful rabbits, came the conviction that someone had watched until she had left, and then entered her uncle's room, in order to converse with him and see to his real state, the stranger must have timed his departure most accurately, must have gone in immediately she had left, and disappeared just before her return. One thing remained certain, that he needs must be a friend, one who took great interest in it all, and knew all the goings and comings of the house. 'Ah!' she sighed to herself 'can it be Mr Warren?' this idea she put aside as ridiculously impossible, and yet unconsciously the notion would return, and she more than once found herself meditating on the thought that the earl of Banbury's ghost must be watching over her, could not leave her for long, and was present whenever danger was nigh. She completed her toilet, and went down to breakfast; there to meet Mrs Greville, and her alone. Of Mrs Greville, Ethel knew little. They had been introduced to one another; and while Ethel gazed with surprise at the other's unusual cast of beauty, Mrs Greville felt hatred rise within her.

This was she, to whom Greville had proposed, and been rejected. Not that Kathleen loved her husband, but she felt, that their position and interests were bound together; if he were despised, it reflected also on her; moreover she felt that all her own attractions were lost, utterly eclipsed by the dignity, modesty, and perfection of this English lady, whose beauty was of the highest type: her figure tall, and at first sight apparently slight, but gradually her proportions revealed strength; the breadth and depth of her shoulders and bust promised power of endurance, and length of life; her straight nose and well-shaped mouth were the very supreme of the Scandinavian race; her high and broad forehead showed talent and mental power; her light blue eyes sometimes laughed with good humour, sometimes melted and became suffused through pity or generosity; her hair of a delicate brown, passed in waves above her forehead, and its profusion needed not the addition of bought tresses; her small foot and well-turned ankle were necessities to her elastic and graceful movements; and, to finish, her truly christian faith gave such a peaceful and self-denying

expression to her countenance, as to arrest the attention of even passers-by; and in her own circle and family was pleasure and consolation to all. They met: Ethel spoke with calm good-nature, and meant what she said; Kathleen threw a well-acted enthusiasm into her address, and gradually brought the conversation to the pleasure of London fashionable life; she delighted to expatiate on its dissipations and follies; but to her great annoyance her companion listened, yet showed no regret at having passed the season in the country. To Kathleen she seemed to have lost all ambition and love of pleasure, and to be merely concentrated in her care of 'Old Beal.'

How strange! and yet what a waste of money, time, and everything, had Greville made, when he tried, by means of superior wealth and the fashionable reputation of himself and wife, to move the envy of the (in her opinion) heartless being now before her. Suddenly, after a considerable pause, Kathleen exclaimed,

'I declare, Miss Beal, you have never seen my diamonds!'

'Yes, I have,' answered Ethel. 'Do you

not remember the evening when you wore them?’

‘Yes,’ said the other; ‘but that was not half or a quarter of what I possess. You must come to me after lunch and see my treasures; indeed, you must!’

Kathleen felt as if a triumph were hers; how envious and sorrowful would the other be that she had, by her refusal of Mr Greville, lost such magnificent jewellery. She, when they parted after breakfast, hastened upstairs, chose and ordered her most beautiful and expensive dresses to be laid out on a sofa and chair, so that a blaze of wealth and elegance might greet Ethel on her entrance. Amidst all her pleasing anticipations, she never forgot her appointment with the gipsy woman, and some half-hour before the time was in the garden wandering about as if to wear away an idle hour, while inhaling the perfume and health of the open air. When the time was nigh, she strolled to the wicket, went gently through and slowly up the drive. When she arrived to where the path through the wood passed across the drive, she unconsciously glanced at it, and there stood her old gipsy ally. She turned down from the large open space,

and was immediately out of sight of the house.

‘Well, woman,’ she said, ‘tell me again all you know about John Smith.’

‘Since I was with you this morning, I have talked with Mag ; she asserts that without a doubt it was John Smith, whom she saw. She is a clever girl, and deserves a reward for her information.’

Kathleen knew the power of money, for good or for evil, and a suspicion crossed her mind that all this story about the lost game-keeper was mere invention, a mere device, in order to obtain money. She remembered when last she had given anything, and could easily understand how the gipsy longed for more.

‘I always reward according to results. Let Mag really find John Smith, so that I can see and verify the fact ; then, and not until then will I pay her for the information, and if really true, I will pay her well.’

The gipsy looked at her, and seemed lost in thought ; Kathleen acutely judged, that either she knew more than she had told, or was considering how far she might venture to deceive. Strange, but both ideas were right. The gipsy woman did know more than

she spoke, and was also thinking what deceit she might practise.

‘My pretty lady, it is a pity that you believe not in our power over fortune; for if you did, we could make out the probable end of all these events.’

‘No more of that nonsense,’ answered Kathleen; ‘look on me as a woman, and not as an ignorant girl.’

‘How much, lady, will you give if not only do I trace this man, but show him to you beyond all doubt?’

‘If I so see him that I confess him to be the right man, I will give a five-pound note.’

‘Too little, my pretty lady: think, I may have days of wandering; think how I must go far from my own tribe; think how little kindness an old gipsy woman receives. Say ten pounds, my pretty lady; ten pounds, and I will begin my journey at once.’

‘Ten pounds be it!’ impatiently answered Kathleen; ‘you old fool, you always try for more, and so often lose what you otherwise would get.’

In her inmost heart the gipsy said, ‘Lady, the old fool will some day make you pay for that;’ but openly she answered, ‘Whatever, my lady, you wish, I will do. You must

bear with an old woman. I have neither the strength nor the cleverness I once had; nevertheless, all I have is at your service.'

'Woman,' said Kathleen, 'I just believe so much of all that as you know to be true; the devil would sell his favourite child, and no doubt you are one of his daughters. Now go on your mission—go that way, while I go mine.'

Kathleen went by the path until she reached the large drive; her companion gazed after her; the gipsy spoke not, but murmured—

'You limb of the devil; a proud overbearing slut, you, you! Yes, I know all you would wish to hide. Yes, while you pay gold I will, by truth and untruth, win it from you. Yes, the day will come when even an old fool will show you her power and her knowledge.'

'Mother,' said a voice of a man close to her, 'tell me how to find John Smith and I will give you a gold sovereign; and when I have him I will give you a second; moreover, if you wish it, I can tell you also how I found him.'

The old woman neither started nor showed

the least surprise ; she answered collectedly and slowly,

‘So that you may win the ten pounds.’

‘No ! you know me ; and I pride myself in being the most truthful rascal in England. What say you ? You know, and can trust me, even if you wish me dead, and would do me to death this very instant, if you could.’

‘John Pickard,’ answered the woman, ‘how long is it since you have seen my daughter ?’

‘A long time, mother, and worse luck ; for I cannot live without her !’

‘Then die like a man ; for never shall you see her again, unless both you and she part, and be bound by a curse.’

‘Never, mother ; no, never ; but say, how about John Smith ?’

Now, the old woman knew that Pickard was an active, cunning fellow, well versed in all sorts of poaching, and never caught but once, and that was by this very same John Smith ; so, on the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief, she resolved to turn an honest sovereign while he was in the humour ; at same time she could not resist the temptation to abuse him, and if possible lower him in his own opinion.

‘You ? John Pickard ! you truthful ; a

more lying deceitful coward never tried to lure a gipsy maid from all a gipsy should be. You? you are a snake without a sting; a bark without a bite! a two-legged limpit; but give me the sovereign; money is scarce, and where you have stolen so much is a wonder, give it me; good! now mark; John Smith was seen at Makworth Farm, and is gone, that is all I know. If you should find him give me the other gold piece, and tell me or not, just as you like best.'

'Mother,' said John Pickard, and stopped; he drew a breath deep and long. 'Mother,' he again said and sighed.

'Well, Pickard?'

'Mother, do you believe in the devil?'

'Truly; or you would never have been born.'

'So do I; no man, no devil, and mother, mark this, no woman shall keep Rhoda from me.'

'Aha! Pickard, do you believe in God!'

'Truly; or you would never have had so much mercy allowed you.'

'So do not I, to Him you had better pray and pray in vain; for no power on earth or in hell can save Rhoda, she dies, and that soon, she is dying even now. One chance

she has, she lives if you solemnly—and you know how—give her up. Try your God, and see if he can save her.’

She spake and she was gone ; she passed behind some thick bushes ; the turf echoed not her footsteps, all was silent, and Pickard stood alone. He waited a few seconds, then throwing his right hand and arm up towards heaven, he said :

‘Oh, God of my mother, have mercy on me a sinner.’

Slowly at first he walked along the open glade, he thought deeply. Without Rhoda his life seemed to be a death, he more than once muttered, then suddenly checking his impatience, he prayed, not once, nor twice, but several times, and always with the same result, a calming of his passions, and a clearer perception of his duty and interest.

‘John Smith,’ to himself he said, ‘I must find ; he has been a true friend to me and my mother. Old Moll and that lady wish him evil ; I am bound to warn him ; he is a clever fellow, not what he pretends to be, and can well take care of himself. Ah ! it also strikes me that no one in the world could help me about Rhoda with advice and active

assistance better than he would. I must find him.'

He stopped and looked around. Until now he unconsciously and mechanically had followed the path into which he had chanced to strike. Now he recognised the path; it led to the head-keeper's lodge. While he walked he recalled to his mind all his daily intercourse with John Smith, and appreciated and wondered more and more at the powerful influence exerted over himself by this man, almost a stranger. 'Stranger?' he mentally ejaculated. 'Stranger? he is no stranger; he knows the woods, the trees, the rocks, the stones; he knows everything about the place better than any man here. I wonder who he is? Not John Smith, that is plain; and that dark-haired lady at the Manor knows more about him than she would like to tell; and I would wager much that old Moll also knows something, aye, and not only about him, but about that lady also. Well, all this shows that for his sake, my sake, and for all concerned, I had better run him down. Yes, his dog "Slip" knows him, and all who know him know his dog "Slip," therefore the dog shall be my companion, and if by trap or net I do not catch

him, why, the old cunning and luck have deserted me.'

A brisk pace soon brought him to the lodge; he knocked, and Daddy Brooks' gruff voice bade him come in.

'Well, Pickard, what news do you bring?'

'No news, master, but I have reasons to wish to have Slip, the dog, lent me. You know how to trust me now, so let me have him and no questions asked.'

'You can take him, only remember that he is John Smith's favourite; and I have promised to keep the dog in safety until his master's return.'

'Just so; I know that. Tell me, master, have you any news of John Smith? I hope you have, and good news, too.'

'None,' answered Brooks; 'he is gone, and I live in hopes that in due course we shall see him back both safe and sound.'

Brooks went to the door of Warren Knowles' room, opened it, and called Slip, who came out crouching and unwillingly; but when Pickard had spoken to and patted him, he at once cheered up; and on seeing Pickard put on his hat, and rise to go, he testified joy by a few merry bounds.

'Ah! poor fellow,' said Brooks, 'he hopes

you are about to take him to his master. I have not seen him so light-hearted since his master went away. Good-night! Pickard, be kind to him.'

'I am always kind to a dog,' said Pickard; 'Good-night.'

The dog Slip and the once poacher walked away on the best of terms; the dog's instinct or his reason assured him that to be with Pickard was the best means of finding his master. Through the deep woods he trotted in front; an occasional wag of his tail betrayed that his pleasure was great. On their arrival at the widowed mother's cottage, he gave one loud bark of approval; he awaited the opening of the door with his nose applied to it. On the widow opening, and bidding them to come in with a welcome, Slip sprang past her, scurried upstairs, and all over the house.

'He is looking for his master,' said the widow, 'if his master is on earth, Slip will find him.'

That evening Pickard had a long talk with his mother. She praised him on account of his gratitude to John Smith, and once again encouraged him to persevere in an upright life. She took great interest in all his pre-

parations, and pondered over all he had told her about Kathleen and the gipsy woman. He now always told his mother everything that he knew, or that happened; and once, making a great effort, he had told her all about Rhoda, and his love for the gipsy maid. She did not answer, during an hour, while he waited patiently; at last she shut her Bible, and looked for a time—and most lovingly—at her son.

‘John,’ she said, ‘I do not quite like the idea of you having a gipsy girl for your wife, seeing that a wife makes or mars a man; still I never saw, and never even heard of this maid; and we hear of the bad much sooner than about the good; so be careful, watch, inquire, and note her habits; do not be in a hurry; time brings a solution for most things; if a man will wait he will see strange things, and avoid many evils; it is generally the pace that kills.’

‘Well, mother, I would rather please you than please myself; but, mother, if I lose Rhoda, I should go mad, or die; if she is false, there is an end of me altogether.’

‘Nay, John; say not that, whatever happens, it is the will of God; but I only advise you to look, and to look well, before you

leap. Rhoda may be the truest of the true, and so far as I know, she is. So do not despair, do your duty, and trust in God.'

'I will, mother, and my first duty is to find John Smith; and as no one knows better than I do the advantage of caution, I and Slip, will start at once and be clear of Knowle estate by many a mile before the moon rises, and mark this, mother, look here! see! the brass plate on Slip's leather collar is movable, thus, it is made on purpose to hold a message, so if anything happens to me, I will, if I can, put a paper under the brass plate and send Slip home to you; once free, he is sure to come here, in preference to Mr Brooks; but wherever you meet him without me, look at the plate, and act accordingly. Now, Good-bye.'

The mother and son had a tender farewell, and his steps were all the lighter for her blessing. He avoided all the most frequented paths through the estate and neighbourhood; when he reached the open hill and heathfield, he struck off from every track, and climbed the ascent in its most lonely part, until just as the eastern sky showed the first dawn he stood near to Makworth farm. There he halted, and he, with Slip, crouched in the

heather; and although both kept on the watch, they nevertheless rested by the repose of limb. They marked the successive movements at the farm; saw the herdsman turn the cattle down to drink from the clear running brook, and drive them back to the field; soon the dairy-maid appeared, and milked the cows; next the smoke wreathed above the chimney; the farmer and other men came out, and scattered to their several employments, some near home, and some far afield. Pickard noted everyone who went or came; and when he doubted if anyone was or was not John Smith, he appealed to Slip; but the dog acknowledged not even one as a friend. Time sped on, the sun arose; Pickard divided his pocket-breakfast with Slip, and both drank of the clear stream. While thus occupied he saw the farmer's wife drive away; so, taking advantage of the absence of her, whom he justly supposed to be more experienced than those left behind, he entered the farmyard and walked to the house-door. He inquired if the farmer was at home, then he requested to see the mistress, but to both questions he received the answer in the expected negative.

‘Then, is the gentleman at home?’ he said; and, on observing the hesitation to answer, continued, ‘for I have a message for him which, I know, he would wish to receive.’

‘There is no gentleman here. We have had several this season; now they are all gone.’

‘I mean a tall, fair man, with a kind word, and a pleasant laugh for almost everyone—even the dogs and children take to him.’

‘Ah! yes,’ said the maid, with a cheerful smile, ‘such a gentleman was here, but he is gone, and I do not know where.’

‘Is there any chance of his coming back?’ said Pickard.

‘I cannot say,’ was the answer; ‘he may or he may not. Just before he started he said, “Do not be alarmed if I do not return, and if I do reappear, which is very probable, do not be surprised;” and so he went away.’

‘Just like him,’ said Pickard: ‘which way did he go?’

‘Down the hill, but where afterwards I do not know.’

‘I fear I must take my message elsewhere: but could you, for curiosity’s sake, let me see the room where he slept?’

‘With pleasure!’ she replied; and so Pickard and Slip were shown up into a bedroom. Not a single extra article had been left there; all had been cleaned and tidied; but Pickard looked for a sure token and it came. Slip became excited, gave a loud bark, and sniffed round the room, and looked, although he looked in vain, into bed and arm-chair. Pickard merely said, ‘Quiet, dog!’ and the dog, satisfied that his master was no longer there, followed him downstairs and out to the road, along the which he slowly went, observing carefully every object, and meditating how to discover his friend. Among all the strange events of this world, perhaps the strangest are the combinations: how, when least expected, man meets man, friend finds friend, and enemies come to the same spot. As Pickard and the dog strolled down the road, he suddenly said,

‘Hillo, Slip; what do you see? hey, my man! there is something in the wind that I do not perceive.’ Pickard looked to the right and left; up and down, he saw nothing strange; he listened, no unusual sound met his ear.

‘What is it?’ he said. Slip sat down, and while he rested on his tail, he drew his

head to its greatest height, cocked his ears, and with intense look gazed along the road. 'Oh,' said Pickard, 'it is that way, is it?' So he stood beside the dog, and waited; nor had he long to wait. At a distant turn of the road, a carriage came in view, while Slip without altering his position, moved his forepaws up and down a few times, and gave a gentle whine. Pickard at once recognised the carriage from Knowle Mansion, and not wishing to be seen by anyone from that house, sprang lightly over the hedge, called the dog, and lay down in order, if possible, to discover who from the Manor now drove this way. The carriage came and passed; he had made no mistake; not only was it Mr Beal's carriage, but he, with doubt, recognized Mrs Greville as the lady to whom he had talked in the garden, and whom he had lately seen in conversation with old Moll, the gipsy woman. Judging rightly that Mrs Greville would return home that afternoon, he cautiously again went up the hill, and determined to pass the whole day on the heath, and abstain from seeking food or house shelter, until he had himself seen the Knowle carriage go on its return back to the Manor. Mrs Greville descended at Mak-

worth farm, and never mentioned the object of her visit ; she merely inquired if visitors and tourists were ever entertained there, and partook of a repast. The chief question was 'How long had the last visitor remained ?' and 'when had he gone away ?' to this, the reply was, 'He had left last week ;' in both the questions and answers the 'he' was emphasized. Kathleen was content with these replies, she knew the world, especially the wicked world too well, to trust to the truth or untruth from anyone. Satisfied, therefore, with the fact that a man had been there, and that old Moll and Mag imagined him to be John Smith, alias Hilton, she trusted to chance and unconsidered words, and to all the events of life, to bring better evidence to light. She appeared to be an idle lady on a holiday, and acting up to the character she had assumed, she gave orders that her carriage should at sunset go to the foot of the hill and wait there her arrival. She strolled out of the house and up the hill, the higher she rose the more pleasure she felt ; forgetful of her immediate object, she wandered on until she reached the highest point. She sat down on a rock and reposed ; sometimes let her mind rest on the past ; sometimes recalling herself

to the present. She surveyed the hills and valleys with a binocular, and had a curiosity to trace the distant streams and their origin, from near to where she sat. As she watched the sun, now about to set, some moving object attracted her attention to the left; and having quickly turned her glasses in that direction, she most plainly discovered two men and a dog. Even while she inspected them, the tallest of the two pointed her out to the other, and immediately slunk back by the path he had come, and disappeared round the shoulder of the hill. The man, who remained in view, appeared to converse with the one now out of sight; then looking round for a few seconds, gazed at Kathleen; and no doubt her binocular reflected the rays of the setting sun. Suddenly he and the dog were gone, but not before she had recognised John Pickard; for well she remembered her interview with him in the flower garden, and how she had sometimes seen him since then. Although she had beheld the other, the tallest, only during a few seconds; still she had realized the fact, that his form was familiar to her, and she even hesitated to say, whether or not, he was John Smith, alias the doomed

Hilton. Again and again she looked far and near, and all around ; but neither men nor dog appeared in sight. The sun set, and the valleys darkened, so she hastened to follow the track by which she had come up, and in due time reached her carriage. During her drive homewards she meditated on the two men. About John Pickard she had no doubt, but as to the identity of the other, to her it remained a puzzle. She knew of Pickard's intimacy with John Smith, so at last she came to the conclusion, that if Hilton were alive, the tall man must have been him. His quickness of sight, and the suddenness of his almost immediate disappearance, both tallied with Hilton's accuteness ; while the cunning, yet less sharp Pickard had allowed her time to recognize him. Long before the end of her drive, she had determined to act, as if the tall man had really and undoubtedly been Hilton. She resolved to employ force to secure him, so that she herself might settle the question of his identity. She gave him full credit for all his cleverness, but she also felt that he could not deceive her. She thought over the several ways in which force could be brought to bear. The most feasible seemed

to her to be the employment of several gipsies—reckless men, who would risk anything for money; and this, at first, through the aid of the old gipsy Moll, but before actually making use of these fellows, she resolved to see, and to speak with them; to point out how and where to catch this individual, and yet to mention no name; and thus let the event prove itself. She would therefore, after breakfast to-morrow, see old Moll; and if she were not forthcoming, go herself to the gipsy encampment, and talk to the men. She arrived at Knowle Mansion, just as the first dinner-bell sounded over the neighbourhood.

‘Ah,’ exclaimed old Brooks, as he heard its clang in the far distance, ‘you ring merrily as usual, but for Mr Beal you ring in vain.’

As the bell ceased its cheerful voice, Ethel entered her uncle’s room.

‘I fear your dinner, dear niece, must be a dull affair,’ he said, ‘it was a merry time once, I wonder if ever again I shall leave this bed alive, I feel much weaker.’

Ethel drew nigh and sat on the side of his bed, she raised his hand and kissed it, then still retaining it she looked suddenly at him,

and two large tears trickled across her fair face. She felt the vanity, the utter emptiness of riches, her uncle might even now be dying, and all his hundreds of thousands could not save him. She with the other hand pressed her eyes, bent forward and burst into an uncontrollable agony of sorrow. A hand and arm passed round her waist, and gently raised her; the softest of hopeful voices uttered, 'Sweet Ethel, weep not so bitterly; there is yet hope.' In her agony she looked up and sobbed, and wondered if they could be true. She saw three gentlemen in the room, and as they bowed to her, she, by the effort of her natural dignity and modesty, resumed her self-control; she pressed her two hands on the arm that supported her; released, she turned; both her hands were clasped in others, and raised to the lips of Warren Knowles. Still retaining hers, he let his hands fall on each side, and having quietly said, 'Not now, Ethel, but the moment your uncle is well enough,' he let go her hands, and addressing the other gentlemen present, continued: 'Sir Gwillim, will you now kindly turn your attention to Mr Beal?'

Strange that Ethel felt no confusion,

neither from the tenderness of Warren Knowles, nor from the unexpected visit of the gentlemen. One she heard addressed as Sir Gwillim, so at once understood that he was the celebrated and most skilful medical man of the day. The other was Mr Crofts, the local doctor. The inspection of Mr Beal was minute and long, many questions were asked and answered, his temperature taken, his pulse felt, and still Sir Gwillim sat and watched. At length raising the eau-de-cologne from the table, he looked at it, and addressing Ethel, said,

‘Miss Beal, would you kindly fetch me an unopened bottle like this?’

She rose and left the room.

‘Now that Miss Beal is gone, let me say to you two gentlemen that there really is very little the matter here with her uncle. You, Mr Crofts, have cured him; but your lack of assurance has forbidden you to see the true effects of your skill; at same time, Mr Knowles, you have done perfectly right in bringing me down; so much so, that it is necessary for me to remain here to-night; he is very weak; and it requires the greatest attention in order to start him on his road upwards safely and wisely. To this I shall

attend, and no one but myself, for the next twenty-four hours; by that time I hope to see him much improved, and quite fit to be left in the hands of his niece. Well, here she comes; so I shall not tell her too much; and you, gentlemen, had better tell her nothing until I give you leave.'

Ethel entered and looked round with surprise at the cheerful faces in the sick man's room; so much so that she stopped, and gazed so inquiringly, that Sir Gwillim answered her look before she could speak.

'Yes, Miss Beal, we might be supposed to look too cheerful, but let me assure you that instead of finding our patient in an utterly hopeless state, as we really dreaded, we find him on the road to better health; yet he must have care, skilful care, so much so, that I remain here to-night, and I alone will see to all he takes until bright day to-morrow; then, in the afternoon, you shall come back and again nurse him. Now go to dinner with a good heart, for, subject to the will of God, I believe your uncle will live and do well.'

'Oh, Sir Gwillim,' exclaimed Ethel, 'it is too much good news!' and she burst into tears. Knowles hastened to bring forward a chair,

and Sir Gwillim, with gentle energy, forced her to sit down ; he brought her a glass of cold water, and she gradually recovered. A knock came to the bedroom door, and ere it could be answered, Mrs Greville entered. Sir Gwillim rose, and bowing, said,

‘Madam, this is a serious affair—very serious ; and although we thank you for your solicitude, you must really retire. Mr Beal is in a delicate state ; and when I assure you that I shall not leave him until late to-morrow, you can yourself see that no one must enter uncalled. Miss Beal, you and this lady had better go to dinner.’

He again bowed ; and Ethel, casting one cheerful glance at her uncle, said,

‘Good-night, uncle ; we hope soon for better times.’

Turning to Kathleen, she added,

‘I fear we must go. I am sure dinner waits for us.’

So the two ladies left the room, and descended together.

‘Who are the three gentlemen upstairs ?’ asked Kathleen ; and Ethel straightforwardly answered,

‘Sir Gwillim Mewse, the London medical man ; Mr Crofts, the local man, who until

now has had charge of my uncle ; and a Mr Warren, who, I believe, is some way or other a connection or a great friend of Mr Beal. They say my uncle may possibly, with great care, yet recover.'

'Is it so? That cynical old Sir Gwillim was so abrupt and ungentlemanly that I had no time to notice who they all were. Oh, what a blessing did that man confer on the world: he who invented champagne! I do so love it!'

CHAPTER III

ON the morning of this day (even as before stated), John Pickard having, from behind a hedge, seen the carriage from Knowle mansion drive up to Makworth Farm, he quietly sought the wild heath, not by the usual ascent, nor even by a beaten track ; he crept under the hedges and in dry ditches until he came to a small stream ; up this he straight-way went, and thus in the most covered way reached the open country. There feeling secure, he leisurely strolled up a dingle, his solitary thoughts being occasionally disturbed by the whirr of a frightened grouse or the sudden jump of a mountain hare. Slip en-

joyed the situation, and sometimes made small casts on his own account, although good education forbade him to wander far. Pickard often halted when within view of Makworth, so as to note that the carriage still stood in the yard. In one of his casts the dog suddenly seemed to come on some scent more congenial to him than fur or feather. Pickard with difficulty made him come to heel, and even then he turned his nose in the direction of the taint. Pickard, tired of his repose, arose, and immediately Slip returned to the pursuit. As his master cared not which way he went, he was indulged in making out the object, and although he had to make continual turns, he nevertheless always hit off the scent that so much attracted him. In this sport both man and animal delighted; the dog, in all probability, knew his object, but to Pickard all was strange; so not only did the love of a chase lure him on, but also a certain degree of curiosity. In this pursuit dog and man went up the steep side, and then with the same caution descended into the valley beyond, and slowly up the dingle to the left for some distance. At last the dog stopped and crouched, so

Pickard knew that they were close on the object of their chase; but what that object was he wondered much; lion or fox, grouse or tomtit, polecat or mouse, he could not guess. Slip crouched lower, and brought his legs well under him for a spring. Pickard laid his hand on the dog's neck and gazed at the heather—the heather was so thick and high, and the peat so broken, that any animal or bird might be there hidden and no eye could reach it. Pickard had waited a while, and had just loosed the dog, so that by its spring it might seize the object beyond, when a voice said, 'Hang it, hold him tight; I would not have that brute at my throat for a mine of wealth.'

With these words a tall man rose up from among the heather. Pickard said to the dog, 'Down, my man, down,' and walked up to the stranger, he was taller than Pickard by a head, had dark hair, and brown eyes, which were not improved by the addition of a red beard; Pickard was amused by the look of dread which he cast at Slip; 'I say, is he safe?' he uttered; Pickard assured him, that at his word, the dog would not move; 'Now,' added he, 'As we have come up with you, just tell us, who you are, and what you do

here? You see, I am a gamekeeper, and so have authority.'

'Not much harm. Three days ago I lost my way, and just as night came on, dark and wet, I stumbled on to a small cot, it looks like a shepherd's place of refuge; so I turned in, and there slept the night out; next day I went down to the low land, and bought food, and also inquired after a friend of mine, but could not find any of the name, so, when night again came on, I returned to the small cot, and right snug it is; this I have done during three nights. I once lived in a very wild country, so I was up to the dodge of gathering heath and fern for my bed. Come and see it; it is now close bye.'

'Come along,' said Pickard, 'I know the cot. It is for a couple of gamekeepers, there to watch in July and August, and save the game from poachers. Come along.' They soon reached the cot, built between two large rocks, and quite hidden from any accidental visitor. Pickard entered and found the marks of recent habitation; so believed what the stranger had told him. He was somewhat puzzled as to the exact state in the world to which his companion belonged. His clothes were good, but dirty

and disordered, his hat had once been a good and well made 'broad brim,' now it was misshapen and indented, his face and features were not those of a mere rustic, nor yet expressive of refinement; to what class he should belong, at first Pickard hesitated, but a glance at his hands decided the question, not only were they dirty, but grubby, and the nails crammed with black; the hands showed habitual filth, and total absence of soap and water. Pickard classed him at once, and accordingly said,

'Now my man, let us have the truth, depend on it, it will tell best in your favour before long. Who is the person whom you seek?'

'Hang it,' answered the other, and even used a common and yet fearful curse, 'I have asked and walked many a mile, and even called at several post-offices, but all in vain; but it is as much a fact as yesterday's sun, that here I am with a rich friend somewhere near to me, and I likely to starve.'

'Let me hear the name,' said Pickard, 'and out with it, I know pretty well everyone within a fair distance.'

The tall man hesitated, he scratched his

head, and then twirled his hat round his hand the which showed dexterity, but not decision.

‘I do not know,’ he said, ‘I must find my friend, and yet somehow it is a puzzle.’

‘Well’ continued Pickard, ‘think ! you say you have mentioned the name to several post-offices and walked many miles in order to ask elsewhere, just think your connection with that name must be known to many, post-office keepers are for the most part sharp fellows. Tell me and I daresay your difficulties will be at an end.’

‘How do I know,’ put in the other, ‘that you are what you say?’

‘That you must take on trust, here. I have some food left in my wallet ; just eat a little ; your brains will be all the sharper for some food.’

He swung his wallet round, and produced a hunch of bread and cheese. Pickard at once believed the assertion that the other was likely to starve. Like an acute man, he allowed the stranger to eat on in silence ; he knew that the way to the heart is often through the mouth ; and so it now proved to be in this case.

‘That is very refreshing !’ the tall man exclaimed. ‘Yes ; my brain is clearer. Now

to business. The name I am looking for is Greville. Did you ever meet with that name ?'

'I have,' answered Pickard ; 'a strong, set gentleman with a cold eye—a dark, cold eye ; rather stout, and when with the gun, always asks how soon lunch will be ; a rich man, and rather stingy. Is that your friend ?'

'Not quite sure ; but tell me, has he a wife ?'

'Aye, he has a wife ; a dark-haired, blue-eyed, comely beauty ; but like her husband, she thinks of no one but herself.'

'Now, just tell me where they live, and I will give you half-a-crown when I have seen them—mind you, "them."'

'Rather difficult at present,' said Pickard. 'He is in London, and has left his wife down here in a neighbouring mansion.'

'All the better,' said the other. 'Show me that lady—Mrs Greville, and let me have a word with her, and five shillings for your trouble.'

'Come along,' answered Pickard, 'we shall have a long walk across the hills. I shall leave you near "The Dusty Shoe" public-house, and next day I will show you the lady, and how to speak to her.'

‘No,’ said the other, ‘not to-day; I am too tired. Lend me a shilling to buy food, and to-morrow or next day the five shillings shall be ten.’

Pickard thought it over. Ten shillings were a great temptation to him, and nothing wrong to be done in order to earn it. Still his companion might bolt with the shilling, and never be seen again.

‘To tell you a secret,’ said Pickard, ‘I do not wish to be seen. I am anxious to be quiet. So if you can take me in a sly way, and by some bye-path, down to a shop, we can buy food for the night and morning; and to-morrow early we can leave the cot, and be across the hills, and at “The Dusty Shoe,” before dark. What say you?’

A little more talk and the two companions and yet strangers, started on their way; they passed up above their small dwelling, and round the shoulder of the hill, while they followed a sheep-track. The tall man led the way; suddenly he sprang round, jumped past Pickard, and hid himself in the heather.

‘What now?’ said Pickard.

‘Just look at that opposite hill, there is a man with a gun, and he was aiming at me

point blank. Just look, and then bolt out of shot as I have done.'

Pickard again turned, and gazed to where the other had pointed. At first he really believed that some man was aiming a gun towards him; it glittered in the sun and moved slightly, as if the aim were uncertain. He gazed and gradually he made out that it was no man, but a woman! still he gazed, and soon decided, that the woman on the opposite hill was that very Mrs Greville of whom they had just conversed, and he guessed that instead of a gun, she held a 'Spy-glass,' (as he would have called it,) and was making him out, so he threw himself also into the deep heather, pulled Slip with him, and then comfortably reclining he watched the lady. The sun began to dip behind the hills, before she moved, and then in all haste Pickard whispered, 'All safe, speak not; follow me; it is best for us both.'

The tall man peeped round the hill, and having made sure that the coast was clear, he hurried after Pickard, who had already started, he even risked his gain of ten shillings, in his anxiety to watch Kathleen's retreat. It was easily done, she hastened down the hill and past Makworth farm,

reached her carriage, and was soon on her way to the comforts and luxury of Knowle Manor.

‘That is done,’ exclaimed Pickard, ‘now for our food, and some good ale, let us eat it down here, and take some up to the cot for to-morrow. Come along, I know the way.’

They entered a public-house, ‘The Broken Trace’, where he appeared to be recognised, and having treated his companion to a full meal, he and his guest went back to the watcher’s cot. There side by side the two strangers passed the night; meanwhile Kathleen had grown restless. Ethel remained with her for only a short time after dinner, worn out by long and almost constant attendance on her uncle, but now calmed in mind by the comforting words of Sir Gwillim, she early sought repose with a clean conscience and a thankfully pure heart, she laid herself down to sleep; Kathleen reclining on an arm-chair in the drawing-room, let her thoughts wander to evil and sin.

If that was Hilton on the heathfield, she must have him captured and in some way killed—for little did she suspect that one of the two gentlemen she had seen with Sir Gwillim was the object of her hatred. Could

that man Peter Ward have deceived her? No, Hilton's illness was too true; and yet there was mystery. Dead or alive, he must be found. The old gipsy woman's theory occurred to her: that his thorough disappearance argued that gipsies must have, in some way, been concerned; then it crept into her mind that gipsies were the fittest men to secure Hilton on the wild heathfield. She could not rest. She rose and walked to and fro; the solitude of the room oppressed her; she undid a shutter, and threw the window wide open; the moon shone through a mist, which hung heavily on the trees; an owl hooted its night-call in the wood, how it sounded like the voice of a man in distress. She listened; all else was still. She closed the window and shutter, rang for a servant, and bade him put all lights out as she would retire, and Miss Beal would not again descend. Once in her room, she re-arranged her dress, and leisurely prepared herself for a night ramble. Ringing through the now silent house, she heard the hall clock strike eleven. She put out her light, and noiselessly opened her room door. She listened; not a sound met her ear save the tick of the clock. She had often before, and now once again, passed

through the darkness as if she had the eyes of a bat. The bolts and fastening of the hall door were not unfamiliar to her; she undid them and passed out. With a practised step, and mindful of the skill she had learned from early youth, she screened herself from observation by eye or ear. For upwards of an hour she followed the paths through the woods, until at last she reached the margin of the heath. Here she stopped, and again listened; no sound save the distant murmur of a hill-stream; not a bird nor an animal moved; neither owl nor bat flitted by; the mist hid from her all except the nearest objects. She moved noiselessly on, and was actually among the tents of the gipsies ere a dog challenged her approach; then a small cur sprang forward and barked; a man stood before her;

‘I am a friend of old Moll’s; I come from the Manor House.’

The man touched his hat, and motioned her to follow; he led her to a tent, and having said a word in the gipsy tongue, left her. Old Moll soon appeared, and having drawn forward a log of wood, requested Kathleen to be seated. She herself sat down on a large stone, and having scraped together the

embers of a wood fire, placed on it some faggots, and warmed herself in silence. Presently she said,

‘Now, my pretty lady, what do you need from an old gipsy?’

‘Six or seven strong fellows, who can catch and keep an enemy.’

‘Ah! my pretty lady, it is the old story. Some consult us to learn how to win their loves, and others come to be taught how to get rid of an enemy.’

‘Perhaps so, but let us not waste time in fooling. Can I for money, get some six or seven men, who do not fear to take one man, and can I get them at once?’

‘Surely, my lady, at a word; but how about the coin?’

‘How much?’ Kathleen said, ‘at a word.’

‘My pretty lady, there might be bloodshed; you deal with those who yield not easily.’

‘How much?’ repeated Kathleen.

‘One hundred gold Victorias.’

‘Too much, you old hag; fifty queens, and not one more,’

‘Think! my pretty lady, think!’

‘I will not think,’ exclaimed Kathleen, and rose in well-feigned anger, ‘I can get

my work done elsewhere for less ; and she turned to go.

‘Nay, then we will take fifty. Is the work near here, or far off?’

‘Some miles. I will see George Lee, and tell him all, he must be one of my men.’

Old Moll went to a tent, and soon returned with George Lee. Kathleen had again seated herself ; the man did the same ; in the course of half-an-hour she had fully explained all she needed. She had mentioned no names ; ‘But whether you know him, or do not know him, secure the man I met on Makworth Peak ; a tall man, with a fair moustache and beard ; let no one know of your going or coming ; let me hear of your return ; old Moll will call me so that I may see the man ; I do not wish him to be harmed. Now off, and waste no time.’

Old Moll and Kathleen sat by the fire ; they talked not, the old woman smoked her black pipe, and Kathleen watched. She scarcely heard or saw the seven men rouse from their sleep, and leave their tents, nor would she have heeded their departure, if George Lee had not come to her, and said ; ‘Any last words?’ Kathleen merely answered, ‘None,’ and only thus was she able

to note the time, when they started. For nearly half-an-hour she remained, but as all was silent, and the fire burnt low, she said to Old Moll—

‘Remember, strike two stones together, at the corner of the garden wood, until a white handkerchief is waved from a window, then wait my arrival.’

‘I know, my pretty lady; but will not your ladyship give the poor old woman a guinea? A broken sleep is bad for old age.’

Kathleen willingly gave the guinea, and went her way. The men, with the habitual craft of gipsies, passed along wood and glen like ghosts. George Lee well knew all the hills near Makworth; and by Kathleen’s description, devined that the men, in all probability, had sheltered in the ‘watcher’s cot.’ Towards this he bent his steps, and for several hours the seven gipsies trudged on. Just as the faintest streak of dawn shone on the clouds above the horizon, Slip growled; and patting his head, Pickard said,

‘Down, Slip; I am too tired for nonsense!’ Some five minutes went by, and again the dog growled; this time in a peculiar tone, so that Pickard jumping up, and giving his companion a bang on the back, whispered in

an earnest voice, 'Some gipsies are near, we must look out, or we shall come to grief. The door was softly opened, and Pickard, ere any could enter, came partly out into the outer air, in an instant he was on each side clutched by a gipsy, while a third laid hold of him in front, he had just time to say, 'Down Slip, and follow,' and while the gipsy drew him from the doorway, he again said, 'Down dog, and follow.' The sagacious dog growled not, he crouched on one side, and obeyed his temporary master. The tall man was brought out, although he struggled with a determined will, his efforts were in vain, he was pushed down alongside of the other, who calmly said, 'Ah ! I thought that would be the end, you might have got free and bolted, but these fellows run well, and would have caught and nabbed you in the long chase, now we had better be quiet, and keep our strength and presence of mind.'

'Yes,' said the head of the gang, 'you had better be silent and do as we wish, and thus no harm will come of it; but,' he added, as he turned towards Pickard, 'I have more than half-a-mind to knock you on the head, just to pay off old scores and save trouble; so you had better mind what you do or say.'

Pickard saw it was George Lee ; much he feared the finish to this affair ; George Lee hated him, was brother to Rhoda, and therefore wished him put out of the way. His hands, and those of the tall man, were tied, and, surrounded by the gang, they marched for many a long hour across the hills and the long descent which led to the woods of Knowle estate. Not a word was spoken, and nothing but their tread could have betrayed them to a passer-by. Once they crossed the high-road at the foot of the hills. Here they halted, and a scout went up and down in order to see if any traveller was nigh ; a slight whistle, denoting safety, was given, and they all passed over to the woods beyond. Pickard knew every step, every tree, every stone, and much he wondered at their destination ; and still greater was his surprise when they took to the small bye-road which led to the village of Knowle. They did not meet anyone, all was still and too early, even for the dairy-farmer ; through the village they hurried ; a light yet burned in the large old house, where dwelt Peter Ward ; there flashed through Pickard's mind the idea of a rush and a call for help ; but as he looked around him, he noted the seven

resolute faces, and saw that George Lee's eyes were fixed on him, and understood his half-resolve. Onward they went, took to a path well known to him; and his wonder still increased, never had he seen a gipsy tent in that glen. They halted at length close to a waterfall; the gipsies drank, but no one cared to offer some of the cooling stream to their prisoners. There they all sat and rested for a time. 'Now let us have these two fellows in,' said George Lee; and ere resistance was even attempted, the two captives had their eyes bound.

'You will not drown us?' said Pickard.

'No,' was the answer, 'and worse luck; it would be a glorious finish to the night's work!'

Four men took up Pickard, and carried him along; he felt a splash of water, and was then placed on the ground; presently the tall man was by his side. In a whisper they were commanded to rise, and, when on their legs, were guided up some strange way; Pickard felt that he was no longer in the open air. They were brought into a room, the bandages were removed from their eyes, and their hands loosed; the man pointed to some water and bread that were already on

a table, nodded his head, and left them. Pickard listened to the locking of the door and to the footsteps. When all was silent, he turned to his companion and cheerfully said,

‘I wonder if it is you or I who is wanted; it cannot well be both.’

‘No, not rightly,’ answered the other; ‘yet it cannot be me; the only person who wishes to show hospitality to me is Her Majesty the Queen; and these men scarcely look like her trusty catchpoles!’

‘Time will show,’ said Pickard; ‘I shall partake of the slight refreshment offered us, for I own that I am tired and thirsty. Here is your half of the bread; in water there is an hospitable plenty. Your health, and a quiet rest to us both.’

He ate his share of the bread, and drank a most refreshing draught. He had just nestled into the straw, which lay in a corner, when a subdued voice, which sounded like that of an old woman, said outside the door,

‘Here is a dog come in, and unless you send him away, the men, when they awake, will kill him.’

‘All right,’ said Pickard, as he jumped to his legs; ‘just let me see him for a moment,

and he will be off, and save you all the trouble; he must see me first—it is a way he has.’

He drew a small piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket, and wrote, ‘Find John Smith; tell him I am imprisoned by gipsies, and in danger of my life. I depend on him.—J. PICKARD.’

‘Here is the dog, do not make a noise or the men will be on us.’

Pickard gave the dog-collar a twist, pressed the engraved cross aside, placed the small piece of written paper under it, shut it with a click, and patting Slip’s head said, ‘Now off and away, home! home!’

The dog gave a wag of his honest tail, trotted down the long open way, and disappeared from view.

‘I am glad of that’ said the woman, as she fastened the door outside, ‘it is poor Slip, I knew him well six months ago, but thought that George Lee had killed him. I cannot bear to see a dog killed.’

‘There,’ said Pickard, ‘that is a kindness from God, almost a miracle; now take a drink and lie down to sleep. Good-morning to us both, I shall be asleep in no time.’

CHAPTER IV

KATHLEEN had slept well, no anxiety for the future weighed on her, no care for the past. At ten her maid entered her room, and in pleasant accents woke her, by praising the fineness of the day and the brightness of the sun. Her toilet was passed amid cheerful converse, and the gossip of the house-keeper's room. At breakfast she and Ethel spoke little, and each, when released from the other's company silently rejoiced. Ethel met Sir Gwillim in her boudoir, and heard with irrepressible pleasure, that her uncle had not disappointed them, he was now decidedly

better, and all the medical treatment had not been in vain.

‘But it has required much care,’ added Sir Gwillim; he was literally in a state of starvation. Mr Crofts had cured the original injuries sometime now past, and ever since, he has been torturing Mr Beal with slow but decided decay from absolute want of proper nourishment. I have known other cases of the same sort; it is not so rare as it might appear.’

‘How shocking!’ exclaimed Ethel; ‘what? my uncle, but for you, was doomed to die of hunger! Is it possible that a medical man can make such a mistake?’

‘Alas! it is too true!’ said Sir Gwillim. ‘Now tell me, who was that lady, who came uninvited into the patient’s room last night?’

‘Mrs Greville. She is wife to a friend of my uncle.’

‘I understand. I at once saw that you did not like her, and you are right. I never saw such a false expression, such a demon look; and scarcely ever have I gazed on so much beauty, and of such an uncommon style; but Miss Beal, perhaps it is almost needless to say to you, “Trust her not,” never trust her, and never believe her, I

should think her as false a woman as can be. You can now again have the care of your unclé. I hope you have had a good night's rest, and are well in every way.'

'Yes, thank you. I feel refreshed, not only by a long sleep, but still more by all your good news and kindness. I can never thank you enough.'

'Nay, young lady; your thanks are not for me, but are due to Mr Warren; he brought me here. I came professionally, and have been fully repaid by the pleasure of your acquaintance; moreover success in our profession is in itself a great reward, and we do not all this without an "Honorarium." When you see Mr Warren you can thank him, but not too much; generous men cannot bear praise or thanks, and he is the most generous and kindest of men. You cannot imagine, what a benefactor he is to the many poor, and also to many rich people.'

'Yes, and notably to my uncle. I will some day tell you how he saved my cousin, Lady Stagely's, child. When you see him, Sir Gwillim, do urge him to see more of my uncle. He is in reality the saviour of Mr Beal.'

'Completely so,' added Sir Gwillim. 'Now,

if you will allow me, I will have a second breakfast, a chat with my old friend Mr Warren, and so off to town. There, I see Mrs Greville in the flower-garden, no doubt going for a walk ; she is justly proportioned and moves well. How can I find Mr Warren ? I promised to see him before I left Knowle Manor.'

'We will send a servant for him. In the meantime do tell me something of his antecedents ; we know so little about him, and my uncle must be most grateful for all his kindness.'

'Really, I can tell you very little ; and I was under the belief that you were well acquainted ; truly you make me wonder.'

'We know very little about him, but at least you can tell me some of his good deeds,—you said you could.'

'And will ! It is only a very short time ago, last month, that at the club, a member, who had lately great misfortune, laughingly said, how strange it was that few would help him, even one of his best friends, who would every way have helped him in a single misfortune, declined to do so, when his misfortune was doubled. "How so ?" Mr Warren asked. "I asked him," said the other, "to help on

my son, who, of course, suffers through my misfortunes, and is an anxiety the more, and he would willingly have done it, but when he reflected that my son had married not well, he wrote to me and honestly said, that this marriage was such a drawback, he could not do a single thing for him, or in other words, for me. So I am left to suffer, through my son's unwelcome marriage." "It is a hard case," answered Warren; "let us sit down and talk it over."

'They did; and before the end of the month, the father, with tears in his eyes, told me how Mr Warren had helped his son, and relieved him of all anxiety on that point; and "he (finished the father) a mere stranger." I, Miss Beal, could tell you a dozen of the same kind, or even a hundred; but now we have not time. Next Christmas, if I live, I will come down and tell you of his goodness, until you are tired of it all.'

'Oh! I never could be tired. It is a bargain; you have volunteered, and you must come; and if you could catch Mr Warren, and bring him also, we would both thank you most heartily.'

'I am caught already, Miss Beal, and will come down a willing captive,' said Warren,

as he entered, and bowed that inexpressible bow which had so won Ethel's admiration. She felt confused, and fearing lest a blush might betray her, merely said, 'Sir Gwillim was anxious to talk to you, so I will leave you together;' and she was gone ere either could answer.

'Mr Warren,' said Sir Gwillim, 'we are old friends, and, considering your age, very old friends; so, let me say, that I wonder how you can delay, and not become engaged to that most charming of all young ladies; she is worth her weight in Kohinoors.'

'I shall not delay, and I hope to arrange all on the very first opportunity.'

'Take the advice of an old man; make the opportunity; do not delay. What is the matter now?'

'I have just, as you see, opened a telegram; and I am sorry to say, our friend, Hutchinson, is far from well; it says, I am to come at once. So there is another delay. I shall go with you to town, and then on to him at once.'

'Now, Warren, listen; in just one hour, the carriage will be at the door, and we shall be in time for the next train; so go and find Miss Beal, even if you need seek her in her

private room. You must find her, and when you do leave her, go away an engaged man.'

'You are right!' exclaimed Warren; and left the room. Sir Gwillim settled down to his breakfast and newspaper, as if the world knew him not, and all his days were passed at Knowle Manor.

Warren visited all the sitting-rooms, went rapidly through every alley of the gardens, and looked into each summer-house; but Ethel was not to be found. He rang the bell of the drawing-room, and asked for Miss Beal's maid; one word from her cleared the mystery; Miss Beal was gone for a ride, and it was just possible, as the day was fine, that she might not be home until dark. Warren ran to the stable, and having inquired which way Miss Beal had gone, was soon in the saddle, and in search of her he loved so well. He cantered his horse merrily down the grass glade at back of the house; Sir Gwillim gazed after him, and highly approved of the action. When he reached the part where timber had been carried, he had to ride more slowly, so as to pick out the mark of the horse's feet. In about half-a-mile, he was led to turn down a side drive, where no track except that of Ethel's horse

was stamped on the turf. His own good spirits seemed to pass into the horse he rode; he felt the animal's free action, and let him follow the bent of his own wishes; when he came to another turn, he did not guide it, and yet the horse took the right way. Warren Knowles let it thus choose its own way twice; and feeling confidence in its sagacity, he, when all marks ceased, let it stick to the road that pleased it. The widow Pickard's cottage came into view, and he at once guessed that Ethel was there; he therefore rode to the shed behind it, and here he found her horse. He had soon placed his own in comfortable quarters, and returned to the front; he entered, but was scarcely heeded; the widow and Ethel evidently believing it was some neighbour, who had come and gone, or her son. They were arranging gifts, and discussing kindnesses (to some more prized than gifts) for several poor and old people. He listened with delight to the music of Ethel's voice; it was low and soft, with a silver ring; he marked her deference and attention to the widow; all her words and wishes were full of goodness; 'and last, but not least, where is your son?'

‘He has gone on a journey of gratitude!’

‘Ah! I am so glad that he has become so good and true to you.’

‘Yes; he has saved my life; it was ebbing fast. I knew that he was on the road to ruin; a little more and it would have killed me. Never shall I forget John Smith’s kindness—aye, his kindness to both my sons. Even you, Miss Ethel, do not come up to him in anxiety to do good. May God reward and bless him! He saved my living son, and John is even now in search of him in order to warn him how and by whom his life is in danger. He once bought a dog far above its value, so as to save it from death by the hands of gipsy George; that dog is even now the help on which my son depends in his desire to find John Smith.’

‘Oh, widow, do tell me who can wish to injure—yes, to injure that man: the man whom you call John Smith.’

‘I do not know; I did not ask: when a man keeps a thing secret, I always give him credit for a good reason; so I let John go unquestioned by me.’

‘When will he come back?’

‘I do not know. He can take care of himself; and he has promised, if he falls into

trouble, to send the dog Slip—that is John Smith's dog—home to tell me.'

'To tell you, can you speak dog's language?'

'No, Miss Ethel; but for all that, a dog can carry a message, you see; John Smith can teach a dog almost how to speak.'

'Widow, you talk of John Smith; do you think he is really only John Smith, and merely a keeper?'

'No, Miss Ethel, I do not. I know his voice, and I know his face; it brings to me memories of the past; and yet I cannot give him a name. It is in my brain somewhere, and will come to me when I least expect it. No! he is not John Smith; he is something great and good. May his days be many, and his wife worthy of him! Miss Ethel, I honour you above any woman I ever met, so let an old widow speak to you, and be not angry. Listen to my words, and follow their advice; they are these: If ever John Smith should ask you to be his wife, say "Yes," frankly and at once. Never hesitate, nor think. Say "Yes." Never mind his name, never mind his place as an under-keeper. If ever he should ask you; place your hand in his, and say "Yes," at once lest evil intervene.

‘Widow,’ answered Ethel; ‘he has never asked me, and I doubt if he ever will. I never could have acted, as you have told me, but for your advice; now, if ever to my great joy, he should ask me to be his wife, I will place my hands in his, and frankly say “Yes.”’

‘Ethel,’ said a deep yet gentle voice, ‘Ethel, will you be my wife?’

Ethel heard and rose; she turned towards the voice, blushed, then grew deadly pale; the widow kept her seat, looked on, and spoke not. ‘Ethel,’ again said the same voice, with a slight tone of sadness, ‘Ethel, will you be my wife?’

Ethel rallied her senses, stepped forward, and said, ‘Yes! I will,’ and then and there placed her two hands into his. She looked up again, blushed deeply, and fell forward into the arms of Warren Knowles.

‘It is even as I wished,’ said the widow; I have prayed for this.’

Ethel and Warren Knowles sat beneath the porch of the widow’s cottage; deeply interesting was their conversation and most pleasing was the new tie between them. Time sped, and the coolness of the afternoon came on; they heeded it not, unwilling were

they to interrupt their new happiness, unwilling to pass to the common cares of life—even their silence was joy. In front of the cottage there ran far into the woods a drive, where the grass grew, where the mark of a horse's tramp, or the rut of a cart wheel was seldom seen. Adown this drive Knowles turned his gaze, and said,

‘Ethel, there is a strange animal yonder ; is it an otter, a badger, or what ?’

‘It is coming this way. Is it not a tired hound ?’ she said.

He answered, ‘There is no hunting now ; still, you are right, it is some weary dog, some stray cur trying to find his way home, poor fellow ; if he comes near us we will feed him and give him shelter.’

The dog, at a slow shamble, approached, it did not stop ; to their surprise it came straight to them, crawled up the two steps of the porch, wagged his tail, and lay down.

‘Why, Slip, my poor fellow, what is the matter ?’ exclaimed Knowles, as Ethel and he rose to succour the dog. ‘Has someone ill-treated you, or are you only dead tired ?’ Knowles patted him, and soon perceived that he was nigh worn out with long continued work. Ethel brought water, and Slip with

eagerness drank it; Knowles fetched food, and this also he swallowed with avidity.

‘He is very tired,’ said Knowles; ‘very! but no harm done. He drinks well, and can eat; so a good rest will make him recover; but, poor fellow, I wonder where he has been?’

‘Did not widow Pickard,’ said Ethel; ‘say that Slip was with her son? This bodes no good for him.’

‘She did,’ answered Knowles; ‘and if any thing went wrong, she said, that Slip would bring a message. Poor dog! he has faithfully been to all sorts of places, in order, probably to find me. You asked the widow, if a dog could speak; now you shall not hear, but see him give his information.’

So, bending down; ‘Look!’ he said, ‘how he bears his message!’ and having raised the engraved brass of the collar, he took from underneath it, Pickard’s strip of paper. He opened it and read,

‘Find John Smith; tell him I am imprisoned by gipsies, and in danger of my life. I depend on him.—J. PICKARD.’

‘He does, does he? then, Ethel, I am off sweetest of women, I must leave you,’ after a few moments he added, ‘we must tell the

widow all this, and show to her Pickard's message. She may perhaps also give me some clue to her son's whereabouts.'

'Yes,' said Ethel, 'you must not waste time. Pickard says he is in danger of his life, and he was trying to help you; but, oh, Warren will there not be danger to you?'

'Yes, Ethel, a little; yet fear not. I am so accustomed to these adventures that I have as yet, thank God, drawn through; and now, Ethel, now the recollection of what has passed to-day, will make me cautious. Come to the widow. So, widow,' he continued, 'Slip has come home, and right weary he is. Here is your son's message, read it.'

The widow carefully read it, meditated a short time; read it again, and said, 'Before you start, let me put up some food; many a man, and many a good deed has failed for lack of a crust of bread; if you are hungry now, sit down and eat before you go.'

'Thank you. No! I am not hungry, but you are right; a man does better who has food with him.'

The widow prepared a packet of food; and when all was ready, gave it to him, and a small flask.

‘It is brandy! good brandy! you can drink it if needed, it will not harm you. In case of wounds, or hurts, it may prove of great use.’

‘Now go at once,’ said Ethel; ‘I will see to your horse; and I and the widow, we will treat Slip like a favourite child. No, dog, you must not move; you are too tired already. Widow, can you give any clue to where your son may be?’

‘None!’ answered she; ‘I can only say that he went off towards the grouse hills; he had heard some people converse about John Smith; so perhaps they may have mentioned their having seen you in that direction, but this is only a guess.’

‘It is a shrewd guess,’ said Knowles, ‘for there I have been. Ethel, you must ride with me a few miles, and lead back my horse. Let us go to the shed where they are.’

He hurried off, but the widow laid her hand on Ethel’s wrist and detained her; she spoke not until the sounds of Knowles’ footsteps had ceased; then she said,

‘Miss Ethel, you have done well; you spoke frankly, and said “Yes” honestly. You will never suffer from obeying an old woman’s advice. Did I not add “lest evil

should intervene"? and evil was very near; hesitation would have marred your life for ever.'

Knowles brought out her horse, and ere he could offer his aid, she sprang lightly into the saddle; he smiled and placed her tiny foot into the stirrup; he fetched his own horse, mounted, and looking kindly at the widow, said in a deep earnest tone,

'The moment I can, I will send you a message. I will spare neither money nor trouble.' He turned his look on Ethel, and speedily they cantered down the long drive.

Occasionally a word passed; but for upwards of an hour they never drew rein, and for the last fifteen minutes Knowles let the horses break into a gallop where a strip of even grass spread by the side of a stream; then, to finish, they followed a short way up a dingle, when a small waterfall and rocks on each side forbade farther progress. Here, perforce, he pulled up and got down.

'Ethel, here we really say "Good-bye," for a time. Can you find your way back? We are about ten miles from the mansion; and I go straight up and over these hills.'

'Yes,' she answered, 'I seldom forget any

way once I have been it. Fear not for me, but for my sake do be careful.'

'Fear not, sweet one, the devil has no hold on me—now Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' she said; and bent forward, their lips met, her fair ringlets swept across his cheek; with a loving smile she held out her right hand, he placed in it the reins of his horse; and at a gentle canter, she passed from his sight. Even as he turned to climb the steep rock before him, a small fragment of stone rolled down the side of the dingle, and fell at his feet. He picked it up, and on it saw marks of recent cleavage, with a spring as if a catapult had played beneath him, he rushed up through the dwarf-oak and birch; he clutched the clothes of some person who was crouching in the ferns.

'Oh, Mr Smith, sir! do not hurt me. I am not poaching; I am only seeking my sister, Rhoda.'

'Seeking your sister, Rhoda! and where do you think your sister, Rhoda, is?'

'I do not know, sir. Oh, Mr Smith, do let me go free! I have hunted for sister through many and many a day, and I cannot find her.'

'Now, boy, a little truth were better than

many lies ; but I will not hurt you. Go, and go at once, while I let you.'

'I cannot go. I have ricked my ankle ; so here I lie.'

'Let me look at it ;' and Knowles perceived that his ankle was much swelled. 'Yes, you are hurt ; what is to be done with you ?'

'Oh, kind sir ; if you would but leave me here ! I cannot go to gaol ; it would kill me ; and I must find Rhoda. She may be ill, or worse.'

'Child, be not afraid, I will not hurt you, I promise you, and do believe me.'

'Sir, Mr Smith, sir, have you put Rhoda into gaol ?'

'No, boy, I have not. Now hark ye, you know me, although to me you are a stranger, I always speak the truth.'

'I know that,' said the gipsy.

'You do, do you ? then listen, will you make a bargain with me ?'

'I do not know,' answered the boy.

'I am on a job where I am not unlikely to see Rhoda, so if you will promise to let me know, when next you see anyone belonging to me in trouble, I will promise to help

Rhoda if she is any distress, and tell you as soon as I can.'

The boy looked up shyly into Knowles' face, gazed at him with the mixed cunning and boldness of a fox, and answered in an anxious whisper.

'If you see Rhoda, be kind to her, tell her I have hunted every haunt for her, and am only stopped for a time by a sprained ankle.'

'And what about the bargain?' asked Knowles.

'I would die, I would suffer anything; yes, even go to gaol to help sister. Yes, I will tell you, in spite of brother George, whenever some sister, or one dear to you, is in trouble—he can but kill me after all. But mind, you have promised to keep a sharp look-out for Rhoda. Do you know, I half-suspect that brother George has killed her; I cannot find a trace of her.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed Knowles, horror-struck at the boy's suspicion. 'What could have put that into your head?'

'I know. We are all alone, so just put your ear down: She is in love with John Pickard.'

'And I,' added Knowles, 'am John Pickard's friend.'

A silence came upon them ; Knowles was lost in thought, and the boy was suffering.

‘Come, boy, our bargain is made, I shall not forget it ; mind that you also remember it. Now I will arrange your ankle.’

He untied and removed the boy’s shoe, then lifting him up, he slowly and with bank and placed his foot and leg into the difficulty descended the steep dingle. Arrived at the stream, he sat the boy on the cold running water. Twice did Knowles look at his watch, but he curbed his impatience in pity for the boy. After a lapse of about half-an-hour the boy turned towards Knowles, and in a quiet voice said,

‘I am much better ; but oh, Mr Smith, do let me go free. Is that really a bargain that we made ?’

‘It is a bargain ; and a bargain, nothing can undo. Your sister’s very life may hang on it ; and mind, I shall strive my best to do my share, and you must do yours.’

‘Anything for Rhoda’s sake ! a bargain it is ; only remember, with us it is a blow for a blow, and a kiss for a kiss. Find Rhoda safe and sound, and I will stick by you for ever. Bother all bargains ! Save Rhoda, and I am your dog, even if you kick me.’

‘So be it, boy. Now, where is the nearest house? for I leave you not here to-night.’

‘I tell you what it is. If you take me to the ‘Stag and Pheasant,’ I shall feel safe; nothing can hurt me once there; if they found you, you might sleep a long sleep, and have no dreams.’

‘Never fear for me,’ said Knowles, as he stooped down; ‘Try to get on to my back; I will carry you, and you can show me to the “Stag and Pheasant.”’

The boy was soon on Knowles’ back; and guided by his small rider, in due time they approached the public-house.

‘Just you put me down on the bench outside; the shutters are up, so no one will see you. When you are out of sight and hearing, I will soon make them know where I am; and, Mr Smith, now just walk on the side-grass, and make no noise.’

Knowles obeyed, he crept along on the grass, which grew by the side of the lane, placed his charge noiselessly yet carefully on the bench, lifted his leg on to the support and slipped away; ere he again took to the moor, he heard the gipsy lad bang the shutters with his fist, and call forth the people inside. The short adventure had

been a strange one. Little had he dreamed when he parted from Ethel, that a third person had witnessed their Good-bye. What he had just heard about Rhoda and John Pickard was not new to him; but now, for the first time, he connected John Pickard's danger with his love for Rhoda; and he was somewhat confirmed in the boy's suspicions that the sister had met with foul play, for he had not seen her during a long time; and formerly she often passed through the woods and roads, when he would say to himself, 'There goes Pickard's sweetheart!' For many an hour through the night he walked across the heather; as the sun peeped up, he saw Makworth farm beneath him; the smoke curled gracefully from the house, the dairy-maid was occupied in driving the cows to the stream, while the poultry ran cackling after her. He was soon there, and walked in at the open door; the sheep-dog sprang to his feet, then wagged his tail, and barked a welcome; the four youngest children ran forward with unaffected joy, while an elder boy jumped on his back, and yelled with delight. The dame prepared some breakfast at once, and as if it were a 'matter of course.' While he ate with a

traveller's appetite, he asked, and soon heard, how first a keeper, then an old gipsy woman, and lastly a lady from Knowle Mansion, had all at different times inquired after him, but there all information ceased. He wandered up and over the moors, even visited the 'Watch-cot,' but no mark, no clue of Pickard could he find. One thing only arrested his attention; and this was, that at the cot someone had lately lain on the straw, and a dog had for a considerable time nestled in the corner, also on straw. With all his ingenuity and experiences he could not gather any help from these marks, he had noted the impression of the dog's foot on the mud, but although it was a long foot, like unto Slip's, nevertheless he could not deduct ought from this; it might, or it might not have been the foot of his dog. He gazed at the lay of the land and considered. The hill on which was built the watcher's-cot, was on three sides encompassed by a valley, and in it a stream; on the fourth side was a short descent, and then the land again rose and merged into a ridge above. 'A straw' he reasoned with himself 'will show which way the wind blows, and if I could discover which way the dog left this spot, I would, at a venture, follow his lead;

it might be Slip, and if so I should thus make a start in the right direction ; and if even it were not Slip, to follow his cast will lead somewhere, and providence will still be there. He went down to a spot, whence the stream, after circling the hill, met the base of the ridge, and flowed away at an angle. He walked up the nearest side of the stream, and examined it carefully, but all in vain. There stood a few yards lower down a small rock ; it rose some four feet above the heather, and Knowles ran up it, and sprang lightly across the water ; there, just as he landed, were the marks of the same dog's feet. He landed, and stood perfectly still ; he moved not, lest he might trample on, and deface any further evidence. Nothing more could he discover ; he walked up the valley, and saw no trace ; he passed downwards, and some yards below the rock he discovered the footmarks of several men. He spent some time in inspecting every mark, and finished his examination by coming to the firm conviction, that four men at one part, and three men about two yards lower down, had jumped across ; the deep impressions of their heels in the peat witnessed the deed ; but two others had,

side by side walked through the water ; nine men in all. ' Even so,' he reasoned to himself ; ' An American Indian would ere this have deciphered the whole affair, and why not an Englishman ? The seven men jumped across, because, even as I just now, they were free and unencumbered ; two did not jump ; and why, simply because they were either not free or else encumbered ; if not free, they were captives ; if encumbered, they carried something, the men were unwilling to leave behind ; Pickard in his message said he was imprisoned, then he, in all probability was captured somewhere, and why not near here ? perhaps at the watcher's cot : the dog jumped across higher up, and appears to have kept on higher ground ; no doubt he did not follow, but watched the nine men from a small distance, through fear, or caution ; *ergo* in all probability his master was among them ; but why have fear or caution, unless his master was in danger ? If it were Pickard he would have said, " Watch and follow," and Slip would have acted in the way, this dog appears to have done. All this is presumptive evidence that Slip and Pickard were there.'

He even again examined the footmarks,

and more particularly he noted those of the two men, who had forded the water ; ' Any mark of these men further on will give me the direction they have taken.' He cast one long and attentive glance all round ; he delayed during his short survey, then walked up to a sheep-track, some hundreds of yards above. Along the side of this track he went, and examined the prints even of sheep. After about some hundred and fifty feet, he came on the tread of a man, he stooped and examined ; he stuck his stick into the peat, and ran down to the stream ; yes, it was the mark, without doubt, of one of the smallest feet of the men who had not jumped across the stream. He looked up at his stick above, and noted that he alone had left his mark. Had he done this of set purpose, while all others had stepped across the sheep-walk ; and had these others done so through fear of being traced ? He also took the angle of their ascent. He returned, took a long survey of the footprint, examined the spot, so as to be able to recognise it at a distance ; and adopting the same angle as the others had done, he continued to ascend. Several times he thought he could trace where men had

trampled the heather, but he could make out nothing certain. When he had reached the brow of the hill, he corrected the angle of his ascent, and noted a far-distant rock as his line, and towards this he went. As he kept his observation on the alert, his eyes were attracted by a white object, small but very distinct, placed on a growth of heather, slightly above the rest. Although out of his way, he turned to it, and soon perceived that it was a fragment from a handkerchief of the coarsest material; he raised and examined it, but no mark, no clue to whose it was, and why it was there. It might have been left there by accident; it might have been dropped there purposely; what wiser act could have been adopted by a captive in order to show his way to some friend. He took possession of it and strode on. Some considerable time thus passed; he was on the highest ridge, so he unbuckled his shooting-glasses, sat on a rock, and began a slow and thorough inspection of all around. First with the naked eye he looked and considered all the objects near him, then those somewhat removed, until indistinctness bade him have recourse to the binoculars. He had his reward. On

a ridge far below him his eyes had rested on a white object; again and again his look returned to it; it could not be a piece of quartz, nor a flower, nor even white heather. Having remarked several rocks and inequalities, so as, if possible, to keep his descent on the same angle as the ascent, he deviated but slightly in order to examine the object; it was with a thrill of satisfaction that he again found a portion of the same handkerchief. Not only did it tally in colour and texture, but the edges of each bit seemed to fit the other; this looked like intention; he began to hope that his long day's work would not be in vain. Again he verified his angle of descent; but the day, which until now had been bright and cheery, now darkened over. Ere the rising fog could obscure the landscape, he observed the farthest objects that he could, especially a distant tree, which he knew to be a tall ash by the roadside. He bid farewell to all hopes of footprints, or to the discerning any sign left by the supposed captive. On he went at a guess, and still without a clue; nevertheless he held on, having resolved to reach the road, then there to rest and wait until the clearing of the fog, which would at once

allow him to see the well-known ash tree, and permit him to distinguish traces and tracks of men, or anything else on or beyond the high road. Arrived at this road, he stretched himself on the hard stones, and would have slept; but as the coolness of the afternoon refreshed him, he felt hunger; and now he appreciated the forethought of widow Pickard; he knew that with renewed strength his efficiency would be increased, his senses more awake to any impression, and his observation keener. Having satisfied his appetite, he again threw himself on to the hard road, (not on the damp heather or grass) and slumbered. He slept. When he awoke, the fog had floated away, and all was clear. He arose, and examined the road; he went first a considerable way to the right, but nothing met his sight worth his notice; he went to the left, even to a greater distance, also without effect. He took out his watch, and determined to walk for half-an-hour in both directions. He finished the first half-hour, and to his great regret was disappointed, but on examining the surroundings, his eyes distinguished the large ash tree, and he perceived that in the descent he had wandered too much

to the left, *ergo* he again prosecuted his search to the right. In a short time his labour succeeded, he came on the track of several men which crossed the road; he examined the footmarks, but they were so intermingled, as if they had passed over some before, others behind in a compact mass; he could not identify the small footprint perceptible on the sheep-walk; he was much puzzled as to the direction he should take, for some time he loitered round the edge of the wood, looking and wondering that not a sign, not any index was there, he came to a spot of grass where was an opening into the wood, and whereon some toad-stools grew, on them he looked, and immediately observed that many of them had been crushed, and unable to flourish again. Across the short space on which were the toad-stools he passed with a feeling of hope, he well remembered that not far beyond the outer trees was the small lane, which led to the village of Knowle. He soon was on it, and ever and anon as he reached a muddy dip, he remarked footprints; he could scarcely have told why, and yet he could have sworn with a free conscience, that they were the same as he had seen at

the stream, and noted on the sheep-path. He strolled on, he feared to overlook any mark or token of deviation from the road. As he walked on, he almost trod on a white object; he stooped, and smiled with pleasure, it was the third fragment of the coarse and coloured handkerchief; if he had hurried he might have passed it bye, and left it unnoticed; he sat on the grass, there on a small even space alongside of him, he fitted together the three pieces; there could be no doubt as to their all having once been the same texture; colours, threads, dimensions, and irregularities in the tear, all tallied. He again picked up the three portions, placed them in his pocket, and went on, and still occasionally he came on the footmarks. He passed through the village of Knowle; just as he was abreast of the large old house wherein dwelt Peter Ward, he saw a large lump of clay which lay close to a bank from which it had rolled. He turned his eyes to it, and there, deeply indented, was a footprint identical in shape, size, and general stamp, with that imprinted on the side of the stream. He stopped and drew a long breath. If that mark had been made by Pickard's foot, then all went well; he quickly understood why

this last footprint had been stamped. Whoever was the man whom he had thus far traced, knew the country well, and was aware that henceforward the road was well made, dry, and hard; so also did Knowles. He broke a bow from the hedge and laid it as a covering and protection to the lump of clay. He turned to Peter Ward's abode and knocked; was let in by Peter Ward himself, who invited and almost compelled him to come in and take a seat. He allowed general conversation and inquiries about children and neighbours to run their course, and then asked if Peter Ward had lately received many visits from gipsies.

'Only one, and that on account of sickness. I went with them, and gave what I thought to be the best remedies for fever.'

'Have you within the last two or three days seen a gang of eight or nine men pass by?'

'No, not one; they have had an encampment near me at Beckwood; this morning I went there, to inquire after their sick, and they were all gone, man, woman, and child.'

'Now look here, Peter Ward,' said Knowles; 'often, very often, you have pledged yourself to help me on the very

first opportunity—that opportunity has come. I will not betray you in any way ; but a friend of mine has been kidnapped by some gipsies. Can you help me ?’

‘I think not, show me how I can, and in order to repay to you a small part of the debt, I owe you, I will do it.’

‘I have been for a long time,’ resumed Knowles, ‘tracing my friend, and his captors; I have followed them to within a short distance of this your house, but I have not passed beyond. He has been missed since yesterday morning, or the day before ; I have positive information that he is imprisoned, and in the hands of gipsies ; in fact his life is in danger. Can you give me the least hint, of how and where he might be locked up ?’

‘No,’ said Peter Ward ; ‘I doubt if such a place exists anywhere near here. Your friend might be down some dry well, in a cave, or even bound hand and foot in a tent ; any one of these he might call imprisonment.’

Mr Peter Ward did not wilfully lie ; he never looked at the cells and passages underneath the old castle—where he had more than once seen the woman even now suffering from fever—as prisons ; to him they all

appeared to be open and free to all who knew the secret.

‘Well,’ said Knowles, ‘I shall not give up my pursuit. Good-bye; but if you should see or meet any gipsies, note the place and all about them. Before long I will visit you again. Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye, Mr Smith; I trust you will be successful.’

Knowles returned to the clump of clay, once more he inspected it, then, as a last effort, he strolled on along the lane. His eye glanced at and noted everything: the flight of a robin, a broken twig, all footprints and wheelmarks. He met two urchins on their way to school; even to them he spoke kindly, yet without foregoing his object. He asked after mother, and if they had a cat, and at once won their confidence.

‘Had they seen the gipsies?’

‘No!’ answered the eldest; ‘not a living being since we left mother.’

‘Yes! we found a pretty handkerchief.’

‘A handkerchief! what clever children you must be! Was it anything like this?’ and Knowles showed them the three fragments of coarse texture, which he had picked up, during his pursuit.

‘Quite as pretty!’ said she, and produced the fourth fragment, which now completed the original texture.

‘Aha! said Knowles, ‘good children! now come along, show me where you found it, and I will give you sugar plums.’

‘We do not know—our dog found and brought it to us, before we left home.’

‘Then come and show me where your mother lives?’

The two children turned with him, soon pointed out the cottage, and resumed their walk to school. This then was Pickard’s last attempt to show the direction in which he had travelled, but immediately came the question, ‘Are these traces of Pickard, or of someone else?’

The question was full of doubt, and bade him pause ere he followed further the small clue that he had. He considered the possibilities, the risks, and everything, and finally decided to hasten to widow Pickard, show her the fragments of the handkerchief, and then act according to the deductions which might occur. Evening was lowering over the woods ere he arrived at the cottage, but to him it was evident that the widow had been on the watch, for immediately after he came

in sight, she appeared under the porch. He was about to sit down and rest himself there in the porch, when she said, 'No, supper awaits you, come in, eat and drink, and begin to talk only when you feel inclined,' he thanked her and entered. There ready for him was a supper, he, led both by courtesy and appetite accepted her hospitality, but after a minute or so he began his account of his visit to Makworth farm, of his visit to the watcher's cot, the mark of a dog's paw on the mud, and the tread of many men where they had crossed the stream. She listened silently and calmly until he narrated his finding the first fragment of a handkerchief, then she clasped her hands, and presently held them out in order to receive the precious token. He gave her all the fragments, 'There are four' he said, 'and they complete the set, do you recognize them to have belonged to your son?'

'Yes! you have traced my son. Both he and you are clever; but you have not found him.'

'No, widow, I have not; but I have hopes'—then they relapsed into silence, while he finished his repast.

‘Now,’ said the widow, ‘what is the next step you take?’

‘Simple as possible. Where is Slip?’

‘In the shed, among the straw. I fed him well; and this morning he went with me so far as the shop. He has quite recovered.’

‘I am glad of it,’ continued Knowles; ‘as on his sagacity and knowledge my next attempt to get at Pickard wholly depends. Thank you, for your good supper; now we will get the dog, and I be off.’

‘No,’ answered the widow, as she laid her hand on his arm, ‘No. Much as I long for John’s safety, I say no. Go to bed for two hours, and I will awake you. There, look at my clock; it is now eight; three hours are better than two, so at eleven I will call you, and you and Slip can be off; night or day, dark or bright, you both know, and can find your way.’

‘Never mind the sleep, mother; let me go on with my work.’

‘No, never. Tell me, did you find the food I gave you to be too much, or was it a Godsend while you traced my son?’

‘Yes, it was a blessing.’

‘Then again do as I wish. There, let us

not talk ; go to bed as you usually do, sleep contentedly, rest assured that I will awake you.'

'Well, widow, there is wisdom in what you say. Which is my way?'

'Go to John's room, his bed is ready—go at once, time is slipping on.'

'Good-night, good widow !' Up the stairs he ran, and found in John's room all he could require. He lay down ; a warmth came over him, and so he fell asleep.

Those with dark thoughts love the dark ; and thus it was that Kathleen, although most eager to see the tall man, whom she considered to be Hilton, still waited with enforced patience until the sun was set. The day had passed heavily ; her restlessness made her sometimes seek the flower-garden, then return in-doors and attempt to read, or sit in meditation. She still hated and loved Hilton. Time passed on ; at length the hour came, and she rose to action. Even as before, she rang the bell, ordered the lights to be put out, and retired to her room as if to bed. She listened to the gradually subsiding noises of the house and neighbourhood, until the locking of the house-door assured her that all was still. She placed her clock on the table, and watched

the hand work through a quarter of an hour ; and how tedious it is to mark the progress of three five minutes ! The hand (oh, how slowly !) reached its goal, and passed it ! Kathleen rose, put around her a thick waterproof garment, and over it the red cloak which she had taken in exchange from the gipsy, old Moll, and was soon on her way to meet the old woman. Both, true to their appointment, met at the corner of the 'garden-drive.'

'I hope, my pretty lady, that you are ready for a long trudge. It is some distance from here to where the prisoner is.'

'I am ready,' answered Kathleen, 'let us not waste time, let us go on, and in silence ; you must lead the way.'

'My pretty lady,' again began old Moll, but the other interrupted her—

'No, no, unless it is some necessary information, do be quiet, and go on.'

The gipsy scowled, but answered not ; so turning away she walked on obedient to Kathleen. For a long time no words passed between them ; the old woman in spite even of her long experience of the ways through the woods, found the night so intensely dark, as to compel her to give her whole attention

to their path. Kathleen was obliged to follow close behind her; and frequently knew of the gipsy's propinquity, only by the rustle of her dress. After at least an hour's walk, they entered one of those long open drives, common in many old chases, and especially at Knowle Manor. To Kathleen's surprise, some hundreds of yards beyond them there shone a bright light.

'Woman, what is that?'

'That, my pretty lady, is at Widow Pickard's cottage. I am glad we see it, for it tells me that I have not missed the way.'

'What does she do, so late at night?'

'I cannot tell, I should mightily like to take a peep in at her window; perhaps she is not at home.'

'So should I,' answered Kathleen; 'Let us take a look at her.'

'Not a word then, my pretty lady, until we see that all is safe; if she is indoors, she will not hear us, but beware she might be wandering about outside.'

They went most noiselessly towards the cottage; twice they stopped, when they saw the light move; then again they crept forward, and so to the house itself. They gazed through the window, the widow

appeared to be alone and occupied in clearing the table, on which still were the remains of a substantial supper. 'Poachers,' whispered the old gipsy to her companion. For some time they watched, until the widow, having cleaned and made tidy the table and room, sat down, opened a large book, and seemed lost in her thorough interest in what she read. The two women outside exchanged looks, and again crept away. When well beyond all possibility of their words echoing back to the cottage, old Moll said,

'While at the window I heard someone, or something, move in the wood; it was too heavy for game, and the keepers seldom overlook a stray cow. I think it was a man; it may have been Pickard, or some other rascal. It was not wise for us to go into the light.'

Kathleen answered not at once, but pondered.

'It is strange,' at length she said. 'Which way did it sound?'

'This way, milady—the same that we now follow.'

'If so,' continued Kathleen, 'let us walk quickly and overtake whoever it may be;

you must speak, not I ; and afterwards, if necessary, you must get rid of this person.'

Although they went their best pace, they did not overtake anyone ; so as they came out into the open ground, Kathleen said, 'We must rest, I am not so strong as I usually am, and must sit down ; on this bank I will wait for five minutes.'

There they stayed until Kathleen had lost a pain in her side, and a feeling of faintness ; but if she had known who was before her, and on the same path, no faintness, no weakness would have stayed her.

The widow Pickard had, even as she had promised, awakened Knowles, who was soon downstairs, a few words passed between them ; Slip was also let loose, and dedicated a few minutes to his expressions of love towards his master ; again were food and flask pressed on his acceptance, and with kind words they went out. The widow accompanied him across the open green, to the entrance of the path among the trees ; when Slip gave the peculiar growl, which Knowles knew was a sign of his anger against a gipsy. He and the widow exchanged looks, and he pointed to the lantern in her hands, as a hint that it should be extinguished ; she whispered,

‘Too late ; Slip shows they are near ; go, I can manage.’

Knowles took her advice, and went some yards under cover of the wood ; there he stopped and listened ; Slip remained silent by a pressure of his master’s hand. He listened, and most distinctly heard the rustle of a dress ; presently the light of the cottage window was obscured, and he, with a little care, made out old Moll and Kathleen ; her cloak at first deceived him, but her movements and gestures quickly assured him that it was she who both loved and hated him. The darkness was so intense, that, fearful of losing Slip, or of being induced to speak to him, Knowles tied a cord to the dog’s collar, so that he could understand what his four-footed friend was about, and be able to check him without a word ; and a wise proceeding it proved, for within a hundred yards Slip stopped short, and having turned his face towards the cottage, just began a growl, which was quelled at once by a pull at the cord ; he had discovered that Kathleen was coming his way. Knowles redoubled his speed, and left those that followed far behind. Unnoticed he hurried through the village, all the good folk had sought their rest except Peter Ward,

and Knowles noticed that the light in his study still burned. He presently arrived at the cottage where the two children had received from their dog the fourth fragment of Pickard's pocket handkerchief. Here the great darkness still compelled the master to keep the check on the dog, he feared to lose sight of it, and felt assured that the use of his own voice would prove dangerous. He patted and encouraged Slip ; by means of the tightening and movement of the cord was aware that the dog was on the alert. They moved onward, the dog intent on some object the man cautious, and with all his senses about him. Thus they went forward during nearly an hour, so silent was the night, so desolate and without sound was the neighbourhood, such darkness was on him that he stayed their speed and listened. No sound came to him, save the monotonous fall of distant water, Slip's impatience induced Knowles to go on, and gave hope that it was striving to reach Pickard. Knowles shrewdly considered that if the dog had been sent with the message from prison, from prison it must have escaped, and therefore knew some means of finding the sender. Up a narrow glen they went, and as the sides

closed in, Knowles remembered that onwards there was no exit, still the dog pressed forward. At length they reached the waterfall, and both animal and man came to a dead halt.

‘Now,’ thought Knowles; ‘What will the dog do? many a time have I been here to begin a day’s fishing, but never until now at night,’ still the dog would not rest. ‘Is Pickard drowned in the pool? or is he buried at the water’s edge?’ Then he spoke to Slip, and said, ‘Gently, gently, good fellow, gently! show me the way; gently, gently!’

The dog approached so near to the waterfall, that spray and a slight mist wetted his master, who most anxious to know the object Slip had in view, and yet unwilling to go further, untied the cord from the collar. The dog gave a slight whine, and was gone. Knowles listened bending down, felt all around, no dog was there. In a low tone he spoke, no answering sound. He raised his voice and again called louder; all remained silent, and he was convinced that he was alone. Great and utter loneliness was on him; was his dog also drowned? there he stood, until a feeling of sadness

and despair came over him; he rallied himself and his manhood; he put out his hand to feel the darkness, it was a strange and a weird occurrence. At his feet arose a slight noise, he lowered his hand, it was licked by his faithful Slip. 'Slip, good fellow; where have you been?' Knowles patted his dog, it was wet and dripping. Unwilling to hamper Slip with a cord, lest it might be impeded in swimming or fording the stream; Knowles laid hold of its neck; the dog went gently towards the waterfall, and walked straight into it. Knowles let him loose, and again it was gone. Although up to his knees in water, Knowles did not move; presently, even as he had expected, the dog again was at his side; he reasoned that if the dog could go and come safely, so might he. Again he laid hold of the neck, and when Slip made a run at the falling water, he held on and hurried forward; and lo! he stood under an arch of water, where, even in the intense darkness, the whiteness of foam was slightly visible above him; all else was dark — he could not distinguish ought. He felt around him, and it was rock, save on one side; so, still holding Slip by the neck, he allowed the dog to

lead. Thus stooping he advanced for some way ; then tired of bending, and anxious to watch and listen, he once again fastened the cord to the collar, and thus followed. Still all was dark ; still cautiously on he went ; the cave seemed interminable ; but resolute and patient he persevered. On they went until Knowles wondered how far he had gone straight under the neighbouring hill. In spite of his perfect nerve and firm courage, he began to have anxiety, and there crossed his brain ideas and memories of all dangers attendant on mines, and long deserted vaults. Still Slip led on, seemingly eager and confident. Slip stopped, and Knowles moved not ; he listened, and tried to see, but all was blank. He again patted Slip ; the dog gave a whine, and Knowles heard someone move ; he passed his hand under his coat, and handled his revolver. A voice near, whispered 'Hist!' Knowles listened, it was repeated ; then he also answered, 'Hist!' he stretched out his hand—a wooden partition met it ; he passed his hand up and down, and right and left, but neither latch nor lock could he find—a voice, plainly on the other side of the partition, again sounded.

'Who are you?' and Knowles answered,

'You are Pickard ; I know your voice.

'Yes ! I am ; and you are Mr Smith.'

'Right !' said Knowles. 'What next ?'

'I am locked in ; my companion sleeps.
Can you unlock the door ?'

'No,' again said Knowles, 'I have no means.'

'In that case we must wait. Have you a revolver ?'

'Yes, I have.'

'Then we can bide our time. You must go further on, no one ever comes that way, and I believe no one thinks of going there. Hide yourself as well as you can, and if ever you make a rush, or any attempt in my favour, I shall be ready. Is Slip with you ?'

'He is.'

'Go on at once, and keep quiet ; no one knows when a light may come, and our safety depends on your being unnoticed.'

'I will do it,' answered Knowles, and he, with the dog, continued to feel his way somewhat further, until Slip, of his own free will, stopped. Knowles groped his way to the side, and there found by his touch a small recess, where he seated himself on the ground with his back to the wall, so that any light cast along the dark passage, would not

in all likelihood be reflected on him. Slip laid himself by his side, and having placed his head on his master's lap stretched himself into a comfortable position, then he and Knowles rested sleepless and expectant.

How slowly does time pass amid darkness, Knowles exerted his memory and tried, but only partially, to recall distant scenes and past adventures. His faults and follies crowded to his mind, they appeared more heinous while in that lonely place, where the eye saw not, and the ear heard nought. He made an effort, and forced himself to meditate on some good deed, how trifling it seemed when compared to folly. He prayed, and as his mind became calmer, his thoughts reverted to Ethel, he closed his eyes so as to shut out the darkness, and pleasure and mental rest where his. Some considerable time had thus elapsed, when a quick and sudden movement of Slip brought him back to the present moment, placing his hand on the dog he opened his eyes, a far distant light drew his attention; so far did the light seem to be that at first he could scarcely realise the fact that it was at the entrance through which he had come. He gazed at it with curiosity and real pleasure;

never before had he so appreciated the glory of light: it was a relief to body and mind. He watched the brightness, as sometimes it was most distinct, sometimes obscured by an intervening object. After a time the light became clearer and clearer; he could distinguish the outlines of two human beings. Nearer they came; and to his astonishment, he at length decided them to be old Moll, the gipsy woman, and Kathleen O'Byrne—Mrs Greville. He held his breath, and gently laid himself flat on the ground; he knew that in this position his safety against discovery was greatest; but the light was never used to penetrate the distant gloom. Silently the two advanced, carefully picking their steps, and not heeding aught else. When still at a distance they stopped for a second; old Moll opened a door, another ray of light beamed forth; they entered, and all once again was dark. Knowles now understood that there were rooms and other openings along the side of this subterranean gallery; and that he had to thank his dog's sagacity that not only as yet he had been successful, but also escaped detection; he wondered if there were many persons at that moment in those underground abodes. Were George

Lee and his gang at hand? Were these outlaws near him?—reckless men, to whom murder was merely a means of ensuring secrecy. How fully at the mercy of others Pickard and his fellow-prisoner must be! His life was really in danger. The distant door again was opened, and Kathleen, together with old Moll, came out. They turned towards him, when suddenly Knowles seized the idea of counting the steps. It might hereafter help to find the room where visibly someone, or many, lodged, and even to point out other dangers. One! two! three! and so up to one hundred and seven, he mentally counted. They stopped; old Moll raised a bunch of keys, selected one, and ere she used it, spoke; and the sounds were carried along the wall distinctly to Knowles.

‘Will you go in at once, or first look at the men?’

‘I will look,’ answered Kathleen, ‘they are my prisoners. One only do I want, so you must see to the exit of the other. Open, and let me look.’

The door was opened, and Knowles could plainly now perceive their features, they both gazed in; the door was again closed,

and in a low tone Kathleen said, 'There is one there, whom I particularly wish to be free, and not to know that I had him caught : he knows my voice, so you must speak to him, and caution him to be silent and obey you ; say, that otherwise Gipsy George and his fellows will again be on him, and he will follow like a lamb. When we looked in, he was standing up and shading his face ; the light was too much for him, and blinded him for the second ; beckon him to come with you, and leave me and the other together, and do not interrupt me until I call, or better still, I will, if possible, lock the door from within ; I shall keep the light, you can find your way in the dark ; you do not fear ?'

Old Moll gave the bunch of keys to Kathleen, opened the door, and beckoned to the man, who was standing up, and shading his eyes and face ; still keeping his hand across his face he stepped forward, came slowly out, and Kathleen turned the key from within. Knowles heard, but saw not old Moll warning her companion of his danger, unless he followed her ; then all was silent, save their retreating footsteps ; he again tried to count their steps, but in vain ; then all for a time was noiseless ; still his ear

sought for a sound, and when it came he divined that it was the old gipsy woman on her return; she came nearer and nearer, until he doubted when she would stop; she opened a door, apparently the same as before; the light beamed forth, and all was again darkness and silence. Knowles rejoiced mightily; he had recognised him whom the gipsy led to liberty to be his friend, John Pickard. He half-muttered his thanks and turned his thoughts to his own return; but he dared not move lest someone should suddenly bring a light to bear, and he thus be discovered; and perhaps Kathleen's threat that Gipsy George and his fellows were at hand, was not altogether a fiction. Kathleen, when left by old Moll and Pickard, waited until she was assured that they were gone, and out of earshot; she then drew nigh to the rough bed, on which the tall man lay, and cast the light full on him. He lay apparently asleep; his face was to the wall; she looked at him; there was length of limb; her thoughts were, 'It may be Hilton! but how wasted by illness and misery he is!' Asleep or awake, he, attracted by the light, turned round; resting his head on his hand, the unaccustomed brightness prevented him

at first from distinguishing his visitor. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and then, in astonishment, exclaimed, 'Kathleen is it possible that we meet here?'

It was not Hilton; the familiar accent startled her, then as the whole truth flashed on her, she put the lantern on the ground and laughed, yes, laughed! Knowles heard it and half-arose, his curiosity tempted him sorely to creep forward and listen, wisely his caution restrained him, he lay down as before, Kathleen laughed, yes, laughed! 'If Hilton or the devil, or even Pistol Ball had risen from that bed, I should have felt no astonishment, but to see you! Oh! Mike, Mike! to see you with a long red beard is simply too comic,' again she laughed, and gazed, then gazed and laughed again.

'Kathleen I think you are mad, and besides my beard is not red.'

'Nonsense Mike, your beard looks like a brick; Now do not be angry, for really I am very glad to see you.'

'Well, Kathleen,' said Mike, as he put his feet on the ground, 'I also am glad to see you, but how came you here?'

'How came I here? what a queer question; but never mind, I have a great deal to tell

you.' And so Kathleen sat down beside him, and continued; 'What a strange creature you are. Oh, Mike, Mike! to see you here with such a beard is too much,' and again she laughed.

'Yes,' answered Mike, 'it is all very well to say Mike, Mike, and laugh, but how are we to get out of this blackguard hole? Besides, I am becoming mightily hungry.'

'A little patience, Mike; see, here is the key, and there is a lantern, so we can go whenever we wish. No, not at once. I will tell you what I require you to do, and settle your line of sailing, then we will go—you, your way, and I, mine.'

'I must have money,' added Mike.

'Yes,' said Kathleen, 'money, and all you need; but only on condition that you act as I intend you.'

'To remain sober, or, some stupidity of that sort?'

'Yes, you must remain sober, but that is not all; the great point is that you must go to America, to Docket's Store. What say you to that, Mike?'

'Docket's Store; just the place I should wish to see. I am quite tired of England, where one is not even allowed to get drunk;

now over the water, a fellow can be drunk and sober ten times in a week, and no one says a word.'

'Then there you shall soon be; and mind, when my work is done, I also shall come; for, like you, Mike, I am aweary of England; there is too much restraint and humbug.'

'Well said, Kathleen; that deserves a kiss, and one is enough to start with. Let me hear your plan. Have you money? If yes, then next steamer shall see me step from Liverpool to New York.'

'First, Mike, begone, and at once; I will give you all you need, between this dark den and the merry Docket's Store, enough and to spare. I can only wish I was off with you. We have played our little game, Mike; and Mike, we have won. You and I, once at Docket's Store, will live the life of paradise.'

'You are a darling!' answered Mike. 'I thought I had lost you for ever! What fun to be brother and sister once again. By the doldrums! queer brother and sister we have been.'

'Never did brother and sister have such fun as we have had; and now for business. See, there are fifty pounds, all in gold; and

here is a small paper of the same value, once your name is on the back; so be careful how you write John Smith.'

'John Smith! Who is he? My name is Mike O'Byrne. You have not forgotten that.'

'No,' answered Kathleen. 'Until you see the old place, your name is John Smith, alias Mike O'Byrne, alias Tim the Turner, alias Rory the Runner, alias Brian O'Flagerty, alias'——

'That is enough, Kathleen. I am anything you like best.'

'Then for a time you are John Smith. Go to New York; I shall write; you call on the lawyer, Newdegate Brown. Here, hold the lantern up, and I will write his address for you; there, take it, and keep it safely. He has bought for us Docket's Store.'

'By jabers!' interrupted Mike, 'here is to your health, Kathleen, and a quick return to your estate. Yop! have you any whisky with you?'

'No, Mike; for I never expected to see you.'

'Then whom, by the hooky, did you expect to see?'

‘A better and a prettier man than you, Mike, so now let us go on.’

‘Is that the way the wind blows?’ ejaculated Mike, after a long whistle. ‘When next you speak such queer words, and come to let me free, just bring a drop of good drink; now I must just be content with a taste of your lips.’

‘Ah,’ said Kathleen, ‘you take my breath away; attend and be quiet; do all that Newdegate Brown tells you; get the old place tidy; I have ordered furniture and everything we can wish for; also the best of whisky, “lashings and lavings.”’

‘By jabbers! I feel like a two-years-old.’

‘Yes; and when we part outside this den it will still be dark; when we reach the road you will go to the left, I to the right, and then farewell until we meet at Docket’s Store.’

‘Yop! what fun. Do you remember the time when Pistol Ball first came to us? you were a slip of a girl then. Old Ball and I got so drunk that, when I wished to drown him, I laid hold of Sandy, the Scotch peddler, by mistake, and held him, head downwards, in the cooling tub; how you did laugh when you came too late to save

him ! and what a weight he was when I dragged him into the bush—fifteen stone, if a pound.'

'Ah, pleasant times!' said Kathleen; 'but they will come again!'

'And, Kathleen, do you remember robbing the Indian chief? Faith! your blue eyes lured him to his death; you saved my life that day by blowing his brains out. Kath-ling, you are the devil's own darling!'

Many an adventure and many a sin did they talk over and enjoy; often they laughed when others would have wept. At last Kathleen rose and said,

'Now, Mike, Good-bye; in this den and at Docket's Store a kiss is no harm; but mind, if again by any hap we should meet in England, nothing of that sort, In this country you may do many queer things, but must never be seen to kiss. Oh, Mike, I did not mean that!'

Knowles' patience had alone kept him quiet, the time had seemed very long; occasionally he had heard the murmur of their voices, and now for some time all had seemed still. At length the door opened, and Kathleen, with Mike O'Byrne, both of whom he recognised, came forth. Little

did they dream that Hilton was so near. They knocked at the other door, and old Moll came out; then the three gradually became less and less distinguishable by Knowles, although the light still shone in the far distance; suddenly all was dark, and he knew that in the long cavern, he and Slip were alone. Knowles was a man of imagination and thought; and his stay amid darkness and silence had been occupied in meditation; beginning with the imprisonment of Pickard and another; the familiar knowledge of the place, that old Moll had; his recent adventure with the gipsy boy, and his recollection of that boy's suspicion, that his sister had come to some foul end; and many other circumstances, all ended in the conviction, that in all probability Rhoda was also a captive in this den, he arose, much to Slip's relief, who shook himself in his eagerness. With caution Knowles returned on his former footsteps, he kept his hand on the wall, and thus became aware that several passages branched off, and that sundry doors were there, he tried them until one opened to his hand, into this he made half-a-step, but it was dark and empty, he believed it to be the one lately occupied by Kathleen

and Mike O'Byrne, he shut the door; with his hand still on the wall, he counted one hundred and seven such steps as a woman would have made and then his hand encountered a door, he placed his ear against it but not a sound was there, cautiously, most cautiously he pushed it before him, he entered, a lamp burned on the table, three chairs were there and a curtained bed, not a single person could he see. He went to the middle of this room, listened and looked around. Presently a moan came from the bed he stepped alongside—therein was some suffering being. He waited; an occasional moan met his ear, otherwise all was still. At length a woman's voice groaned forth, 'Mag, I thirst.' Knowles observed a jug on the table; he tasted the contents, it was merely water, so in pity he placed it in the hand of the woman, helped to guide it, and let her slack her thirst.

'Thank you,' she said. 'I still feel very ill.'

Knowles bent down over the bed, and whispered,

'Rhoda. Are you Rhoda?'

An arm threw back the bedclothes; an emaciated face, pale and careworn, made

more hideous by masses of long dark hair, was turned towards him ; two black eyes, that gleamed like living coals, glared at him, and a faint voice answered,

‘Yes, I once was Rhoda. Who are you?’

‘Rhoda, I am John Smith,—I am John Pickard’s friend.’

‘Then he has not forgotten me.’

Exhausted, she lay back, shut her eyes, and moaned. Knowles stood by her in deep sorrow. He now knew how true were her young brother’s suspicions.

‘Rhoda, I am come to help you : see ! old Slip is here ; he knows you, and is pleased at seeing you.’

‘Slip, poor dog, you also did George wish to kill !’

To himself Knowles repeated, ‘You also did George wish to kill ! Yes,’ he said aloud ; ‘and, Rhoda, you and I saved Slip ; now Slip and I will save Rhoda.’

Rhoda opened her dark eyes, and said, ‘How ? it is almost impossible !’

He answered, ‘Rhoda, to God all things are possible.’

She beckoned to him with her emaciated hand ; he again bent down to her ; she, in a deep-toned whisper, breathed forth :

‘I am dying of fever!’

He drew back with horror, but fear he never knew.

‘Rhoda, I and Pickard, we will save you: be of good cheer. Has no one nursed or attended to you?’

‘Mag has nursed me, and Mr Peter Ward has given me medicine.’

‘Alas! has that been your only hope?’

‘Hope! I have none; but I should wish to see Pickard once again.’

‘I will go straight to him, and I shall certainly come back; if possible, with Pickard. Good-bye, Rhoda, but only for a short time.’

He rose to go; but Rhoda opened her eyes, and spoke,

‘John Smith; I have a brother, very young, his name is “Yess;” between him and all kinds of woe I have always stood. Is he alive? Can I not see him?’

‘I have seen him!’ joyfully answered he; ‘the day before yesterday; he is well, but has hurt his ankle. I left him at the “Stag and Pheasant.” He has been everywhere seeking you; he and I are sworn friends.’

Again Rhoda looked up; her lips even formed a smile.

‘Dear child!’ she said; ‘help him, he has no one now!’

‘Him also will I see to. Now, I go, the sooner to return. Good-bye!’

He looked at her with pity—this had once been a laughing beauty. He had twice to call Slip, who remembered her kindness in days gone by. He gently closed the door, and again cautiously felt his way down the cavern, the distant sound of the waterfall already met his ear; he stopped, for Slip pressed against him, in haste he placed his hand on the dog’s head and listened; a rustle came, and close to him passed a woman. She went on; Knowles moved not until she had opened and gone into Rhoda’s room. Then he and Slip came beneath the fall, went through the water, and were once again in the fresh open air, under the wide vault of heaven. He made for the widow’s cottage; he felt his spirits rise while he gazed at the coming dawn. As he passed the large old house at the entrance of Knowle village, he saw that Peter Ward’s household were up; so, with a sudden thought he entered, and having found Peter himself seated in his study, and as usual hard at

work on literary pursuits, he laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

'Move not, Peter Ward; tell me—and I am in a hurry—will you come with me to help carry a sick woman? Her life depends on it.'

'I will. When shall we do it?'

'I go,' said Knowles, 'to get another man. Have a lantern ready and a waterproof. I will, when I can, call you; so stay at home until then.'

'I have plenty of work, thanks to you and the young squire; so here I am a fixture until you return.'

'Thank you, Mr Peter Ward; and Knowles went on at a speed to find Pickard, whom, even as he expected, he met at the cottage. The widow thanked him by words, and even more by manner. While he and Pickard enjoyed a breakfast, he related all his adventures, and lastly his chance interview with Rhoda; poor Pickard leant back breathless; 'I was so near her and did not know it.'

'Tut!' answered Knowles, 'never mind that. I have promised to go back and fetch her. Widow, can we bring her here?'

‘The sooner the better, Mr Smith ; but I know nothing of fever.’

‘I have thought of that,’ answered Knowles, ‘this is what we must do ; you and I, mother, must sew the ends of two coarse sheets into loops all round ; we will measure them, and Pickard will go and cut us some light poles, two for each side, and two for the top and bottom ; this will form a litter ; on it we will place a mattress, and all is ready. Widow, have you two sheets fit for this ?’

‘Aye, that I have,’ she answered, and went to fetch them.

‘Now off with you Pickard, the moment we have measured the lengths ; if Brooks or anyone objects to your cutting young wood, say that John Smith has authority to do it.’

The widow and Knowles deftly measured the right length and breadth, and soon Pickard’s hatchet was heard close bye ; he came back ; and Knowles gave him a note, and said ‘This is for Mr Crofts, the doctor, make great haste, as I shall wait for you here. If by chance you should come on anyone whom you can trust, give him the letter, and bid him bring me an answer here, and he shall have half-a-crown. There, Rhoda’s health,

and perhaps even her life depends on all this. So off, and go with a will.'

Pickard wasted not a second. Knowles and the widow arranged the sheets, and sewed away, in order, if possible to have all ready ere Pickard returned, but long before they had accomplished their task, he was back again. 'I met old Brooks, and told as a secret, that you were alive and well, he chuckled and shook me by the hand, a thing he has never before done, and I never expected. "Yes" he said, "when I saw you all alone I feared for the dog, but now I know where he is." So I gave him your letter, and he said the bay cob should have a sweat for it. It is all right, now give me something to do—I must work or die.'

Many hands make short work. Long ere Knowles had calculated, the sheets were sewn, the poles trimmed and of the right length.

'We must not,' said Knowles, 'make a parade of these. Roll them up, and we, by turns, must carry them. When in Rhoda's room we can quietly put them together. I will take first spell, you bring the two lanterns and the waterproofs.'

'Poor girl,' said the widow; 'I will have

Pickard's bed ready for her, linen and everything all prepared. If Doctor Crofts should come before you return, I will do my best to keep him.'

'Fear not,' said Knowles; 'give him this short note, and he will wait.'

Before the widow's clock had struck eleven, Knowles and Pickard went along the pleasant green wood; they walked with a springy stride, in both was strong hope. At the large old house they found Peter Ward, still in his study and writing; but at a word he was up, and ready with both waterproof and lantern.

'Well, done, Mr Peter Ward; a light heart and a merry one is yours.'

'Light and merry,' replied he, 'ever since that wonderful day when you turned despair into hope, illness into work, and sorrow into joy! It is no use talking; but if ever I meet the young squire I will kiss him; never smile; my great hope is to see him once ere I die. I will give him a hurrah that shall echo from the old Manor to heaven, and, (under the will of God) bring him a blessing down.'

'Come along; but stop, have you anything by you that will be of use to revive a woman who has been, and is still, very ill.'

‘I have,’ answered Peter Ward, ‘I am somewhat of a chemist. Can you say what her illness is?’

Knowles paused and looked at him, then quietly answered,

‘Fever.’

‘Mr Smith, I now know all about it, and I dare not go—I cannot go. The gipsies, and especially the head ruffian, would kill me, burn my house, and ruin my children. There,’ he added, as he placed the waterproof, lantern, and restoratives on the table, ‘there; I do not go. I have said it.’

‘Mr Peter Ward, one word ere we go. I cannot waste time, it is in this case precious.’

‘Then,’ said Peter Ward, ‘go; for anything you can say will not move me. I am sorry for it, but go with you I do not.’

Again Knowles paused; he and Peter Ward looked at one another.

‘Mr Peter Ward, one word—but first, Pickard, just go outside, I shall not be long. Now we are alone, and it is in order to tell you that the young squire depends on you in this affair, not only to help to carry and protect her, but also to bring restoratives and all that is useful.’

‘I do not believe it!’ answered Peter; ‘I

cannot believe it. What! he take interest in a gipsy wench—one of a race to whom thieving, lying, and all iniquity are everyday delights. I do not believe it!’

‘And yet,’ answered Knowles, ‘he took interest in one who had an evil spirit in him; who hated all successful men; and for money, lent the use of his pen and talents to any wicked purpose. In this man he took interest, and changed his heart—why not also towards a gipsy girl?’

‘Words, words, words; words prove nothing. I will not believe it; no! not unless the young Squire, himself, told me so.’

‘Hark ye! then, Peter Ward, I am Warren Knowles!’

Peter Ward answered not—he gazed, and pondered Knowles’ countenance; he seemed, like a child, trying to read an unknown language. Knowles remained standing in simple unaffected dignity; he smiled and said,

‘Are you coming, Peter Ward?’ he turned and left the room and house. The other hesitated a second; then springing up, seized the lantern, waterproof, and restoratives, dashed out of his dwelling, hurried forward, and walked on close behind the

man, whom he now acknowledged to be the 'Young Squire.'

When they had left the hard road, and had entered the narrow valley, Knowles said to Peter Ward,

'For good or for evil, you know these people better than I do, and you have attended this poor girl; we are about to carry her to a better place; so can you tell me when she is most likely to be alone?'

'If I might advise, I should say, let us crouch among the dwarf oak and fern, and wait until Mag leaves the waterfall; it is when the sun begins to dip, she goes home to help cook, and prepare supper; and sometimes a fellow will come to walk with her. I once saw two come, and a rare good fight they had; Mag sat down on that big stone; and walked off with the conqueror.'

'You are right,' answered Knowles, 'the sooner we are out of sight, the safer we shall be. We will follow you, Peter Ward.'

The three stepped through the shallow stream, lay down among the fern, and were as if they had never been. Knowles said, 'Peter Ward, you are the freshest, so watch. We two will rest; but if anything happens, or any one approaches, just touch us, and we

shall be ready. There they lay unheeded. The birds twittered, and the sheep fed ; the afternoon wore away, and the sun was hurrying to its bed, when Mag hastened down the dingle. The three all watched her, and wondered at her speed. The cause was soon disclosed ; two ladies walked on the high road ; Mag hurried up to them.

‘My pretty ladies,’ she began, ‘it is a lucky day, and the sun shines ; let me tell you your fortunes.’

She passed from their sight. They left their hiding-place, and soon, one by one, disappeared behind the waterfall.

‘Now,’ said Knowles, ‘light your lanterns, and speak not ; we must also be quick with what we do.’

The lanterns were lighted, and the three men walked cautiously up the cavern. Knowles had, during his last return, counted his steps ; he therefore knew when he was nigh the room where Rhoda lay ; he easily found the door ; they went in ; all appeared to Knowles to be just in the same state as when he had left it ; he lifted up his hand in order that if Rhoda slept, she need not be disturbed until all was ready for her removal. By signs and by also beginning the work

himself, he showed his two companions how at once to arrange the litter. Slip had been to the bed, and then had come to lie down near to his master. Presently, while Knowles worked steadily, he noticed that his dog again and again gave a slight, a very slight whine; he knew the dog and its ways, so, bending down, he whispered, 'What is the matter?' The dog answered by a somewhat louder whine, to which his master replied, 'Well, old fellow, what is the matter, hey?' The dog rose, and going to the bed, placed his forepaws on it; he gazed, then turning his look toward Knowles, whined loudly. Knowles immediately left his work and strode to the bed; he cast his eyes on it, and, lo! it was empty. Rhoda had disappeared.

'Pickard, we have another task on hand, come here,' Pickard hastened to the bed, looked at it, and turned to Knowles with horror.

'There is a chance for us,' said Knowles, 'here, let us again pack up our goods and be off.'

In a very short time all was ready; 'The dog found you, Pickard, why should he not find Rhoda who was always kind to him,

and called him her favourite? Slip, my boy, can you find her? Rhoda, Rhoda! listen Slip, Rhoda!—and pointing again to the bed, repeated the words—‘Rhoda, hi, and find Rhoda!’ Slip gave a bound gracefully high, then facing the door he bent down, as if he were ready to bound forward, but restrained by the barring of the outlet. ‘Now, Slip, gently my lad, gently.’ He opened the door and the three men hastened forward, in attendance on the dog. Forward they went, up the cavern, past the niche, where formerly Knowles had crouched, some fifty yards further on, they arrived at a fissure in the rock; it loomed as if of great depth, but none stopped to make sure, they passed on by a narrow path between it and the side wall, and reached an arched entrance, where still were the marks of bolts and bars, but all were gone. Knowles looked back, Pickard was close to him, Peter Ward was far behind, he had not the habits of out-door work and active exercise; they waited until he drew near; he waved his hand, and they entered under the archway; a circular staircase—in the olden days called a ‘turnpike’—met them. Up this they wished to hurry, but found the litter and poles to be great im-

pediments, so that although Knowles was most unwilling to wake the echoes of the place, he was nevertheless several times obliged to recall the dog. He noted that the steps, although broad and easy of ascent, were cut in the living rock, he also with his inbred coolness and forethought counted these steps, at the fiftieth he observed that the solid stone ceased, and strong masonry took its place; at the seventieth a long vault again received them, and he reasoned that now, in all probability, they were above ground, and might find some new and easier outlet. At the end of the vault, where a wall barred all further progress, Slip stopped, and with a loud whine, seemed to expect his master to open a way. His master came forward hoping to find a door, but all was stone. He let the light from his lantern shine on it, and carefully examined; no mark, no difference in the wall was there. Still the dog remained firm to the spot. Pickard said,

‘Slip seldom makes a mistake, but I think we are all puzzled this time.’

Knowles spoke not; he felt the difficulty. He thought deeply; mentally he resolved many plans and ideas.

‘Pickard,’ he said, ‘no hurry, wait for Mr

Peter Ward.' Meanwhile his eyes wandered over the whole scene.

Mr Peter Ward came up ; he stopped, he breathed heavily, and said nought.

'Pickard,' again said Knowles, 'take out your knife, and, beginning on the left, tap each stone slowly and regularly while I listen.'

Pickard tapped the stones one by one, but none gave a hollow sound, nor showed any dissimilarity to the others. He tapped each course in succession, until he reached about six feet from the ground, and knocked the middle stone. The moment this was done, Knowles observed Slip to bend, and step forward, then, when Pickard's hand passed on, the dog fell back to its former attitude.

'Stop, Pickard, now very slowly, and dwell on each stone ; tap each stone backwards.'

This was done, and although at first there seemed no difference of sound, now, on the second knock, this stone gave a harder, a less vibrating sound, and again the dog bent and stepped forward.

'That is the stone ; Pickard give it a scrape with your knife, so as to know it next time. Now, Slip, what more can you do ?'

Slip encouraged, merely rose on his hind legs, and having placed his forepaws on the wall gazed upwards.

‘That is the spot, Mr Smith. Slip seldom makes a mistake,’ said Pickard, ‘and if you will sit on my shoulders, you will be able to inspect the whole affair.’

‘Well thought of,’ answered Knowles; put your head down, and up with me.’

Knowles was accordingly raised to an equality with the stone; with his knife he tried all the edges, but no opening, no crevice was there; he leant somewhat backwards, and bringing his lantern to bear fully on the wall, it suddenly seemed to him, that what appeared to him to be apparently joinings of stone, were merely imitation lines made by the chisel. He tried them again with the knife, and this realised the fact, that in front of him one large stone filled the whole space.

‘Mr Peter Ward, will you kindly take off my boots; untie the laces carefully, and do not break them?’

When his feet were freed of his boots, he added,

‘Now, Mr Peter, come and stand close to Pickard. I shall stand on your shoulders,

so as to be able to see what I can do with this stone.'

When he was thus raised, he at first again examined the wall, and discovered the large stone to be about three feet across, and about five feet high ; but no irregularities, no mark of a hand, no sign of its ever having been opened. He again tapped in sundry places, but no difference of sound ; except that it gave a harder sound than did those around it.

'Are you two fellows below tired of my weight ? if so, I can give you a rest.'

'No,' hastily answered Pickard, 'no rest : work away until Rhoda is found, or all is utterly hopeless : nothing must tire us. What ! three Englishmen give in ! Never ! Work on, Mr Smith.'

He did work on, and came on what was really an opening between two stones, and yet embodied in the one great block. He tried this crevice in several ways ; at length a small stone, only about six inches long by two broad, yielded to pressure and passed backwards, leaving a clear space of several inches. After one or two attempts, and with some ingenuity, he moved what he afterwards saw was a copper bolt ; it yielded to his hand ; he pressed on the large stone, and it

fell back on hinges of copper, like unto a door.

‘We have done it!’ he exclaimed: ‘stand steady, my lads, while I go in.’

In he went; Slip, with one bound, was by his side; his two companions handed up the litter, then their lanterns, and themselves followed. Knowles, having first thoroughly examined the large stone, its copper hinges and fastenings, easily shut it.

‘Were you ever here before?’

‘No,’ answered Pickard, ‘never where we are, and how we are to get out is a puzzle.’

‘I have,’ said Peter Ward, ‘once when a flood, down at the waterfall, hindered us there I came in this way. I recognise this passage, but I never went through this entrance, nor down that twisted staircase.’

‘Can you guide us?’

‘No; still if I remember rightly, it was very near this spot that we saw the last of daylight, and my companion led me on in darkness.’

‘Now,’ said Knowles, ‘gently, Slip, gently, our lives depend perhaps on you.’

Slip moved not, he drew his hind legs under him, sat on his tail, and appeared to be perfectly satisfied with his position. Knowles

and Pickard looked at him, then at one another and smiled. For a short time not a sound was there, then the deep silence was broken by a moan, All the three turned in one direction, there could be no doubt from whence it came; their lanterns shed a brightness on the wall, and showed a door; Pickard seized the handle, and they entered. A voice in a weak tone said,

‘Oh, how I have longed for light.’

Pickard hastened to a small bed, cast a light on its tenant, and exclaimed, ‘Rhoda, I at last see you again.’

‘Oh, John! yes, once again ere I die.’

‘Do not say that; we are come to save you; see, here are Mr Smith, and Mr Peter Ward.’

‘Anything, so as never again to undergo this dreadful darkness.’

‘If you, Rhoda, know the way out, you are saved already.’

‘I do, John. Ah, let us go, before George comes back.’

Pickard said no more, he and the others hastened to arrange the litter, while the dog placed his head on the bed, and wagged his tail. Rhoda patted him, and let her hand rest on his neck.

'Now,' said Knowles ; you, Pickard, and Mr Peter Ward lift the mattress, one on each side of Rhoda's head, while I raise the feet. Rhoda, you must trust to us, we shall place you in a litter and carry you out of this dismal place. Do not be afraid when we raise you.'

So said, so done ! two, one on each side of the head of the litter, Knowles at the foot ; each with his lighted lantern in his hand. On leaving the room, Knowles turned to the left, and followed the vaulted passage.

'Rhoda,' inquired he, 'Slip has turned to the right ; is that our way ?'

'Yes,' answered Rhoda, 'it is right. Slip has often been here.'

They turned into the passage at right angles to that, in which they had as yet advanced.

'Rhoda, there is daylight!' exclaimed Pickard, 'you will still live to be happy.'

They arrived at the opening, whence came the light of early morn. Although this opening was very low, not more than two feet, and on the floor ; the men nevertheless managed to draw the litter through without the least disturbance, or inconvenience to Rhoda ; they found themselves in what had

once been a moat; but now half filled with rubbish and large stones. Knowles saw that the opening, through which they had come out, had originally been the upper part of a window.

‘Turn to the right,’ said Rhoda, ‘and after a time we shall be able to leave this hollow.’

‘Stop!’ exclaimed Mr Peter Ward ‘the poor girl has fainted, I am delighted to be of some real use at last. It was your good forethought that made me bring restoratives.’

Rhoda came back slowly to her senses, but she did recover; and all the three men with light hearts, once again raised her. Even as she had said, they were soon able to leave the moat; and once in the open country, both Knowles and Pickard knew every inch of way. Knowles much wondered at all he had seen; the old ruins, the waterfall, and the road they now held, all were part of the Knowle estate. At a quick pace they walked down the hill; and having avoided the village, they were soon buried beneath the green-leaved woods. Twice did they stop to let Mr Peter Ward recover his breath, then on again; and when they had

arrived at the widow's cottage, he sat down on the bench, under the porch, and said,

'Not another inch could I have gone; I am dead beat.'

'Sit there, Mr Peter Ward,' said the cheery voice of Doctor Crofts; 'rest and food will soon make a man of you. Now let us take this poor woman upstairs, and to bed, gently and together.'

They left Rhoda to the care of the doctor and the widow. Everything had been arranged that medical science and tender charity could suggest. When Doctor Crofts came down, he said, 'She has been very ill, and is not well yet. I have left minute instructions with widow Pickard, and I shall be back in two hours, with everything and anything that can be wanted.'

'Doctor Crofts,' exclaimed Pickard, 'if I can be of use to you, say the word, there is not anything that I will not do for you.'

'Do not thank me,' said the doctor. 'I have received positive orders from the young Squire, to spare no exertions, no expense, even if I have to send for a London physician, to make sure of saving my patient upstairs. I am simply ordered to save Rhoda by every means that I can possibly imagine. So

Pickard when you do meet the young Squire thank him, not me.'

'The young Squire,' answered Pickard ; 'the young Squire. He is the man, is he ? How, in the name of wonder, did he ever hear of Rhoda ?'

'It is rather odd,' said the doctor ; 'but when you are as old as I am, you will cease to wonder at anything. So eat your food, for I see you have not tasted it. Mr Peter Ward will be seriously ill unless he has at once food and rest. Good-bye ! I shall be back in two hours. Stay, stay where you are, and eat. My horse is saddled and bridled.'

Sweet were food and drink to them all three, most especially to Mr Peter Ward. In the midst of their feast, Pickard filled a can with ale ; 'Long life and success to the young Squire !'

'Aye,' added Mr Peter Ward ; 'may all I have or do tend to his success, and if needed, my life for his !'

'Here is,' laughed Knowles, 'to his happy marriage, and many useful years passed at the Knowle Manor !'

'Hear, hear,' returned the other two ; and

Mr Peter Ward continued, 'There is not anything too good for him. I and mine pray for him twice a day !'

'So will I and old mother henceforth ; and so will Rhoda, if God cures her.'

CHAPTER V

AT Knowle mansion there were in the dining-room two ladies and two gentlemen seated at dinner. At the foot of the table was Jack Reily, full of fashionable news and the small talk, in which men about town excel; the newest play, the latest scandal, in all probability untrue; how much Lord Whistler had betted, how Mr Jones had lost, and how much Mr Benjamin Brockhurst had won; interlaced with all delicate and indelicate inuendos, which it pleased Jack to invent and improvise for the occasion. To Mrs Greville it was a delight; it was all fashionable and wicked, both to her a great sense of

pleasure. She listened and smiled ; and, giving way to her talents and experience, she won even Jack's admiration. Mr Greville sat at the head of the table, occasionally joining in the conversation, and always enjoying Jack's anecdotes, he never was led to suspect that his intimate friend meditated his destruction, and would look on his annihilation as another man would on the death of a fly, or of anything that interfered with his comfort. Still merrily went the repast. The man-cook knew that two experienced men of taste had arrived, and had exerted his skill not merely in order to please, but also to secure fame. The wine was *ne plus ultra*. While Jack rattled away ; while Mrs Greville by look and word applauded, and Greville himself felt the inward satisfaction caused by wealth and selfishness, while all three gave to the champagne due praise and attention, one lady sat and listened in sadness, the sparkling wine stood untasted before her. Ethel Beal disliked the tone of reckless pursuit after the luxuries and sordid enjoyments of the world, the visible relish of ill-natured stories, she disliked the absence of all good, the appreciation and laudation of evil deeds and ungenerous advantages. Moreover she had not heard one

single word from Warren, during the lapse of three days, she knew his expedition might be dangerous, and he was alone. She answered and joined slightly in the remarks that passed and she addressed herself chiefly to Mr Greville. Nevertheless cheerful seemed the dinner. Ethel's occasional inattention was scarcely heeded, and when the two ladies rose to go, everyone—save Ethel—regretted the end of a pleasant sitting.

‘I am sure that you will excuse me, Mrs Greville, if I go at once to my uncle; we have been so long at dinner.’

‘Long at dinner!’ exclaimed Mrs Greville; oh, it was all too short! But for the wit and merriment of Mr Reily, this house were the “Palace of Dulness.” How charming to hear of dear London and all its excitements!’

‘Ah, Mrs Greville, you are easily pleased. Pray excuse me; I am anxious to see Mr Beal.’

Ethel went upstairs, while Mrs Greville sought the drawing-room, where a manservant soon afterwards entered and said,

‘If you please, ma’am, there is a young boy who says he must deliver a message to a lady here, but does not know her name.’

Kathleen passed out into the hall, and the footman soon returned, together with the gipsy boy. The boy let his eyes scan her face and form, and quickly said,

‘He is not to be found, it is all a mistake.’

‘I know it,’ she answered, ‘There, take your reward and go.’

He took the piece of money, she offered; touched his hat, and walked away. When the door had shut behind him, he stopped, and addressed the footman,

‘There is another lady, I must see her.’

Well, young nobleman,’ answered the other, ‘you order me about, as if you paid me my wages.’

‘I am only a poor gipsy boy, but he who sent me, gave me this, and said, let the man who helps you have this five-shilling bit, when you have seen the lady, so will you do what I wish, or not?’

‘Give us the tip, and you shall see her immediately.’

‘No, long John, show me the other lady, and if she is the one I seek, the tip is yours.’

The gipsy waited until her maid had informed Ethel who, with quiet dignity and an anxious heart, entered the library, and ordered the boy to be brought. He was

shown in, came forward and bowed to her,

‘Please, my lady, could this gentleman fetch my basket, which I have left in the back-yard, and on the bench to the left of the door?’

‘Certainly,’ said Ethel, and by her order the footman left the room, in order to get the basket.

‘Ah!’ slightly jeered the boy, ‘if he finds anything there, he is a sharp fellow. The gentleman who sent me said, that if I told you, how a gentleman and lady rode to the fairy glen, there bid one another farewell, and while she rode home with the two horses, he went over the hills; if I said this you would believe me.’

‘Perhaps I might,’ answered Ethel, ‘but what was the message?’

‘That he is safe and sound; had been completely successful; and was now at the widow’s cottage.’

‘Good boy, you have my thanks for this; but how do you know that I am the right person? I have never seen you before.’

‘No, my lady, I do not think you have; but I have seen you, there is no mistake.’

‘Where, and when have you seen me?’

Answer this rightly and it will confirm your words.'

'My lady there is no mistake. I was lying amid the ferns when he and you said farewell. I saw you stoop down, and my lady I saw all that happened, you then held out your hand, he placed the bridle of his horse into it, and you were gone.'

Ethel blushed slightly, and said 'thank you, good boy, you certainly did see me before, tell him that you have spoken to me, and I will act on his words. I hope you are true to him?'

'His dog, his foot, his hand, not one of these is truer to him than I am!'

'What can be between him and you?' asked Ethel.

'My lady he was kind to me, and has saved sister Rhoda.'

The footman again entered and stated that he could not find the basket.

'Good-night my lady,' said the gipsy boy, 'I will go and find the basket.'

He went, tipped the man the five shillings, and was soon walking lightly away through the still night and without a basket. Meanwhile the two gentlemen remained in the dining-room. Reily moved his chair to the

right of Greville, helped himself to a glass of claret, and said,

‘Old Beal keeps good wine, and the medical man makes him drink some every day.’

‘Does he?’ answered Greville; ‘that looks bad! When will he die?’

‘I greatly fear he is better! and I have an idea that he is on the high road to health and strength.’

‘But, Reily, you are under promise to me to ruin or to kill him!’

‘We have missed our bird, and with both barrels.’

‘Aye, aye, Mr Reily, that is all very well; but please to bear in mind that both these barrels were loaded with bank notes and sovereigns. I have lost a heap of money, and all for nothing.’

‘The fortune of war!’ answered Reily; ‘a retreat is not a defeat. Up, guards, and at them! we must rally and charge home!’

‘Very pretty! very! but before we move again in this, we must submit all our accounts to some experienced “liquidator,” and go thoroughly into them. I have lost more money than I can spare.’

‘Well,’ said the other, while he lay back in his chair, and laughed, ‘we shall find it

all right. I can recommend to you a first-rate fellow ; sharp as a polecat, and honest as the day ; just the man we require, honest Obediah Backshin.'

'I have got one already, so I shall begin at once, that is, immediately I get back to town.'

'Good !' said Reily aloud, 'nothing like decision and action.' He again leaned back, and his unspoken thoughts were, 'Then to town you shall never return.'

'Yes,' said Greville, 'I must act cautiously and as soon as I can. Let us have a week here, and then discover who has plundered me.'

'No one has plundered you, you may take my word for that. Money runs away like sand in an hour-glass, whenever you do work like this. Still if it is a satisfaction, I do not see why you should abstain from this expensive luxury. I wonder by what means all the bills and debts of old Beal's bank were met?'

'Do you?' answered Greville. 'I do not. Some clever fellow heard that Beal was in a difficulty, and too ill to attend to business, so, no doubt he volunteered the cash, and

will eventually be well paid, moreover there was very little risk.'

'It might be so,' said Jack, 'but how anyone could have found out our design, is to me a marvel. I shall take no more wine, thank ye.'

'I shall,' answered Greville, 'and another bottle. Hang it, Jack, do not leave a fellow alone, who needs to be cheered.'

'Well, Greville, just as you like; let us have the wine, and go in for a short life and a merry one.'

Wine they had, and a long conversation about all and everybody. Jack began merrily, gradually let the tone of his voice and wit diminish, and finally rose and left the room. while his companion slept. In the drawing-room he found Kathleen, and her alone; he bowed to her profoundly, and then coming close to her, said; 'Has Mrs Greville yet considered the proposal I made in the flower-garden, just before I left for town?'

'Yes, Jack,' she answered, 'and the more I think of it, the more feasible it appears.'

Jack Reily was a man, who not merely listened to words, but heard the tone and the unexpressed meaning. 'It is a pleasant idea, and' continued Jack, 'it has some most

charming phases. Just imagine you an independent widow, and I a rich gentleman wooing you assiduously, all the world at your feet. Leading the fashionable world if you will it, or living out at Docket's Store, the real and undeniable queen of all you survey, with the life and success of man, woman, and child in your hands. If you marry me then we are of the "upper ten thousand," and high among them, or if we merely flirt it will make a pleasing scandal, or a delicate mystery. You are so pretty, so ladylike, that the wicked world will forgive you many a little lapse. Ah! it is a charming prospect!

'Jack, you are a wicked man! just take one step backwards, or I am off and no more seen this evening. Thank you; and do remember that I am not a love-sick school-girl of sixteen, but that I am'——

'The most charming of her sex!' interposed Reily.

'Nonsense, Jack! Now, suppose that you and I have agreed—merely suppose it, for I have not yet made up my mind—how would you set to work to free me from the foolish bonds which sad necessity has forged for me?'

'Oh, old Greville? easy enough! just give

him a drop or so of foxglove, digitalis ; he quakes at the smallest ailment ; send for my ally, Puritas Toogood, and then it is merely a matter of time. What say you ? shall we marry, or live a life of parallelograms ? What do you wish ?'

'To be free. Jack, I know that under all your coldness the old devil has heaped living coals ; and certainly he can make you appreciate the pleasure woman has in being free.'

'He can, he has, he does ! Kathleen, give one look of kindness, one word in the affirmative, but afterwards be true and make no step backwards, have not one single regret, and I start on our course, now from this moment. Someone, perhaps your charming self, thwarted me once ; with your help, Greville slides gently, but surely, out of this life.'

'Not with my help,' answered Kathleen, 'if ever you by word of mouth, or letter, implicate me, I immediately turn like a boomerang, and strike you to the earth. Do it, do everything, I neither make nor mar, but beware—you began once without my consent, and Jack, did you succeed ?'

'Then I stand alone,' continued Jack, 'you know nothing about anything, you nurse your

husband with tender care, and all the world must know it. Still you must be my reward.'

'Certainly, Jack. When shall we require Puritas Toogood?'

'Let me see!' said Jack, 'say twenty-four hours will make him seedy, palpitation of the heart, abject lowness of spirits, and all that sort of thing. When coffee comes in, order it to be put on the table; if Greville is in the room, I shall help you and myself, you give him the third cup, if he is still in this slumber, you and I can secure our cups, and leave him his on the tray, all ready for his acceptance, on entrance.'

'Yes,' said Kathleen, 'coffee always is very pleasant to him. So I had better write or fetch Puritas on the day after to-morrow.'

'Better fetch,' added Jack, 'it leaves but small trace; never write if you can avoid it. I shall see her once after her arrival, and all will go well. In a short time I shall start for France and Italy, so be clear of the whole affair, but perhaps hurry home for the funeral. What fun it is; my spirits always rise with action.'

'Oh, that is your plan, is it; but bear in mind that I also shall be ill, it is a sad necessity. I wish I could manage without it.'

'Now, Kathleen, are you in earnest, or about to act a white lie?' said Jack. 'I wish I knew your intentions.'

'Simply and truly, ill in earnest. If I am laid up, and you abroad, how will Puritas be kept straight?'

Never fear for her; ere I start, I shall not only instruct her most thoroughly, but pay her; and also leave money, so that she will receive her allowance once a-week from Mr Lyall, until my return. She has done all this several times, and always well; so long as she gets her money, she will not listen to anything, nor anyone; but go on steadily until fate interferes, or the money ceases.'

'What a valuable person she is.'

'She is,' said Jack, 'but do tell me, are you really ill, or about to practise a little shamming? So nicely done, as even to deceive me.'

'Really ill, I am sorry to say,' answered she. 'Can you not cast your thoughts back a few months, and divine some necessity for a short period of illness and retirement?'

'Well' said Jack, without wonder, 'I am sorry for it. I suppose his demise had better happen before your illness?'

‘Certainly, for fear of accident, but I shall be at Mr Lyall’s house ; and no one but Mr Lyall shall know all about it. It is all arranged, for if alive, Greville must never know it.’

‘And he never shall,’ answered Jack ; ‘I shall return in time to be of use to you. Here is the coffee, let me have the pleasure of helping you, and also myself, and then, here footman, just tell Mr Greville that the coffee is ready for him. Kathleen, just look, how beautiful is that statue of charity, as a Queen suckling a beggar family ; that will do, now you can look at me. Well, Greville, I hope your gentle slumber brought pleasant dreams and easy digestion ?’

‘Humph,’ grunted Greville ; ‘I am sleepy still. Let us have our coffee, and then a game at billiards, it is too early for bed.’

‘I am with you,’ said Jack, and Greville drank the coffee, having merely remarked, ‘It is not so good as usual, come along ;’ he and his companion left Kathleen alone, and their steps died away in the distance. ‘Jack,’ said Kathleen to herself, half-laughing, half-seriously ; ‘I shall not drink the coffee which you have, in all probability, so carefully seasoned for me. No, Jack, I am neither

conquered, nor likely to be conquered, 'The game between us is not yet played out.'

She arose gently, walked quietly across the room, opened the door, and listened; not a sound, not even the cricket in the hall. She lighted a flat candlestick and went slowly upstairs. She knew that the servants were at supper, and therefore no danger of interruption. She sought her own room, and found, in the depths of her dressing-case, a small glass bottle; from this she removed two globules, closed the case, and left the room. Again she listened; then, in the same deliberate way, passed on to the bedroom assigned to Jack Reily. She drew his despatch-box slightly forward without hurry or nervousness. She inserted into the key-hole a writing-quill; although unsuccessful at first, she at the second attempt unlocked it. As if she were familiar with its contents, she thrust her thin long hand down the right side and brought up a carefully folded packet; in it was a small oblong box; she touched a spring, it opened; she took the two globules which she held, and skilfully formed them into one, so as to be in size and appearance one and the same with the others already there. She gazed at them in order to make com-

pletely certain that to the eye there was no difference. She shut and replaced the silver box into the exactly folded packet, thrust it into its original lair, re-arranged the enclosed papers, let the lid of the despatch-box down, and hearkened to the click of its Bramah lock, pushed it against the wall, picked up the quill, and having once again satisfied herself that all had been safely and cleverly done, left the room, turned the handle, so as to avoid sound, and descended slowly and noiselessly to the drawing-room. She sat down in the same spot, and mentally she allowed this idea to rise: 'Jack is fond of a chance; I have given him one; he may die to-night, or in a week, or a month, or a year hence, sooner or later; but it must be an off chance if he escape the death which I have just prepared for him. He is the cause of every folly and every sorrow I have had. In my early youth he taught me every wickedness, let him reap what he has sown. I hate him, aye more than I hated Hilton, or even her who was Hilton's sweetheart, and my revenge on her shall come some day. She read some interesting novel—translated from the French—during upwards of an hour. She then arose, sought her room, and soon

forgot her hopes and hatreds. With what pleasure did Kathleen awake next morning, all her plans were well laid, everything seemed to tend towards her success. She had merely to follow the usual pleasures and duties of life, while Reily and Puritas would accomplish the rest. Greville was ill and refused to see anyone. Doctor Crofts was sent for, and duly attended, he pronounced the indisposition to be a recurrence of the late illness. In due time Puritas Toogood arrived and resumed her former attendance. Meanwhile Mr Beal grew better and better, he drove out daily, and talked of joining the family circle at dinner, while Greville growled that the tables were turned, that he himself felt sick unto death, and that 'Old Beal,' would soon be all over the world, even the same as he had ever been, this particularly added to his desire to investigate his accounts with Mr Lyall, and all his doings and expenses through Reily. As he lay on his bed, he meditated these things, and thought by thought came the conviction, that Reily had plundered him. 'Yes,' he said to himself, 'He smiled and he talked, professed friendship, and a real interest in our work, yet all the while he robbed me, so that now

he has the reputation of possessing wealth. He is a rich man, full of health and vigour, successful and honoured ; and what am I ; a dying dog kicked into a ditch—that is about it. If I get well—ah, yes, if—if I get well, he shall pay for it. Fool that I was to marry that Kathleen O'Byrne ; better have wedded someone, anyone, whom I could have treated as a wife. She might have cared for me ; I might have had children to nurse me in my old age. Ah ! if I get well, all shall be changed ; I rather imagine that I could get up a case against that rascal, Jack Reily, and pass Kathleen over to him. What a glorious finale that would be for them both !'

Puritas drew nigh, and as usual gave him some drink. 'It will bring you rest,' she said, 'and hasten your cure.'

He drank it and returned the cup. 'A beast of a woman is that nurse.'

He lay down and dozed off, amid unamiable and distressing ideas. Puritas merely thought, 'At the rate I am now killing him, he cannot last long.' So she sat down in an arm-chair and read her missal. He had dozed for a considerable time, when Mrs Greville's voice awoke him.

'I have come, Mr Greville, to ask you how you are? I hope the night's rest, and the care bestowed on you, have done you good?'

He gazed at her, and did not answer. She asked Puritas several questions, so as thoroughly to understand his state, and as a farewell, said,

'I hope, next time, to see you really better. Is there anything I can do for you?'

'There is,' he answered, 'one that would be a great favour.'

'Do name it, Mr Greville.'

'Simply this, that you will go at once and never let me see your face again.'

'I go at once,' answered she, 'but I fear you will see me again.'

'Yes,' he said to himself, when she was no longer present, 'yes, all are villains; and bar Reily, she is the greatest.'

She passed downstairs, and in the hall put on her garden bonnet, selected a basket, and parasol in hand, went out into the flower-garden. There she loitered, enjoying the balmy air, and occasionally plucking some charming flower, while present to her thoughts were the pleasant day-dreams of a free and wealthy life at Docket's Store; her

husband gone, Reily dead and forgotten, Hilton merely a distant memory, Mike made subservient and harmless ; for what more did she wish ? One wish—one wish remained ; could she obtain it ? It seemed to be the one permanent longing never to be gratified ; revenge on Hilton's sweetheart. Her heart beat, she felt her cheeks grow pale ; she lowered the parasol on to the gravel walk in front of her, and looked far off into the dusky woods as if she could there find her object.

' My pretty lady,' said a well-known voice again at her side, ' I have found John Smith and his sweetheart.'

' Old Moll, how you frightened me !—but what you say is impossible.'

' You shall see him with your own eyes, and see him with his sweetheart. I hope, my lady, you remember all what you promised ?'

' I do, and will pay it if what you say is true ; but you were deceived once before, and may be again.'

Listen, my lady. I had sworn, and swear it still, that John Pickard should never wed my daughter, Rhoda ; but all this I now believe to have been a clever trick. She was shut up where man could scarcely find her ; I bought

a garment from a fever patient, and clothed her with it ; in a week she was taken severely ill, some fools from amongst us laboured to save her, I let them have their way, I laughed at them, time sped on. When I fully and justly believed that death would claim her, in steps John Smith, Mag saw him come, heard his words, and saw him go. We changed her cage, but all to no purpose, while we slept he had her out of our power, a cottage prepared for her, a doctor waiting, and every luxury and medicine ready for her coming. Does that look like a lover or not ? When she was missed, we all, everyone of us, scattered North, South, East, and West. I soon heard of her at Widow Pickard's dwelling, I crept on to it, and saw John Smith, I swear that it was John Smith, believe me, my lady, you shall yourself see him. I should have been here sooner, but I determined to see him in Rhoda's company ere I told you, and, curses on it, a dog growled or barked, whenever I drew nigh the cottage, so that it was impossible. I watched at a distance. Last night I noted on a window blind the shadow of a man ; it was John Smith in Rhoda's room. I knew it was Rhoda's room, all his actions I could not make out ; but

this I did observe, that he several times leaned over her bed, and once gave some drink or medicine ; of all this I am certain, as sure as if I had been in the room along with them. Does not all this point but to one end ? Love, passion, intimacy, anything you like ; he left the room, and immediately came out of the cottage ; I saw that it was him, one and the same, as the man who had just quitted Rhoda's room ; for her he has run the risk of death ; say, is she not his sweetheart ?'

'If true,' answered Kathleen, 'it is absolute proof ; but, old woman, I can scarcely trust you, it is strange ; why do you, knowing my anger and intentions, bring Rhoda into such danger ? Nay, almost certain death.'

'My lady, I long for her death. Pickard, or John Smith, to me it is all the same ; she shall never wed, save with a gipsy.'

'Oh ! that is your feeling on this subject ? Then say, having first of all made me completely assured of these facts, how can we kill them both ? Fever seems to have failed.'

'Poison, my lady, deadly night-shade—easily done, pay me and I will do it. With

John Smith it may be difficult, but with Rhoda it is a certainty.'

'When,' said Kathleen; can I see them? I should prefer to see them together, no more blunders for me.'

'Affect an interest in Widow Pickard, see her once or twice alone; other ladies do it, why not you also? When your visits are no longer strange, let you and I watch, and when the widow is out, and John Smith in, and we have marked him into my daughter's room, you can walk upstairs, peep through the keyhole, and if you like, open the door, and walk in. Do this, and there cannot be a mistake.'

'It seems feasible,' said Kathleen; 'We will try it. I will this very afternoon walk over; you must meet me, and show me the way.'

'Yes, my lady, at yonder road-side; where we have formerly met; say, at what o'clock?'

'At four o'clock this afternoon. Now go.'

Kathleen strolled away, and watched old Moll until the trees hid her, then she thought, 'I do not believe her; it is all love of money. If we find this to be true, and we act on it, I will not pay her one single farthing until I

have seen and recognised the dead bodies. Ah, what a beautiful Marechal Niel rose !'

Kathleen thoroughly appreciated all the luxuries of the senses which she met at Knowle Manor : the flowers, the rich furniture, the soft comfortable sofas, the pictures, the dinners, the wine, the fruit. So her day passed away full of enjoyment until near four.

At four o'clock Kathleen, plainly dressed in a walking suit, was at the cross walk, and, true to tryst, there also was the gipsy.

'Let us walk on, and silently,' said Kathleen ; 'the less we attract attention, the better : go first and show to me the shortest way.'

They walked through the beautiful woods and pleasant scenes, but by them these were unheeded. When nigh the Widow Pickard's cottage, they, with gipsy skill, hid where the undergrowth was thickest, and the slight evening breeze set from the cottage towards them. They watched the widow at her domestic duties, they saw John Smith and Pickard come down the drive, and old Moll rejoiced at her precautions, Slip, the faithful dog was with them, but as the wind was in their favour, he passed on and found them not. The men entered the cottage, then for a time

all was still, until from the far distance came the regular beat of a horse's feet, nearer and nearer it came, and on her favourite thoroughbred Ethel appeared in sight, she cantered to the cottage, pulled up, and sprang from her seat, Pickard came forward, touched his hat, a few words passed between them, and he led the horse to the sheds. 'Does she often ride here?' whispered Kathleen.

'No,' answered the gipsy, 'no, she has not been during a very long time.'

'Then she has been here before now?'

'Yes, often, my lady, but it was when the widow was all alone, she is a kind lady, and no doubt she is here, because she has heard of Rhoda's illness.'

Again silence reigned all around; by degrees the evening came on, a few cock pheasants crowed as they went to perch; a hare drew nigh, sat and gazed for a second, then burst through the underwood and fled. A light shone from the window on the ground floor, the door of the house was closed, when old Moll laid her hand on her companion's arm and signed her to approach; on the soft grass and moss their steps were noiseless. Inside were John Smith, Pickard, and the

widow; no doubt Ethel was upstairs in attendance on Rhoda.

‘She is a good lady,’ said the widow; ‘she often comes to see me—although of late she has been nearly always occupied with her uncle.’

‘She is,’ answered Pickard, ‘the lady in these parts. Why, there is one lady at the mansion who does nothing but gather sin with old Moll, Rhoda’s mother. No one would miss her if she were to die!’

‘Tut!’ said Knowles, ‘there may be more in her than you think.’

‘She may be a diamond to what I know, but she does not shine like one.’

‘Pickard,’ said Knowles as he rose, ‘I will just go upstairs and see if Rhoda needs anything.’

Old Moll pressed her own hand somewhat tighter on Kathleen’s arm, in order to draw her attention to John Smith’s kindness to Rhoda. Kathleen stepped backwards from the cottage, until she was able to observe the window of Rhoda’s room. She watched the shadows on the blind, but could not make out the actions of those within. Presently she saw, that one or both of the visitors were about to leave the room; the light shone

from the stair lattice; she returned hastily to the gipsy woman. No one entered the lower room; they heard the house door opened, and without a noise or warning, a strong dog had hold of old Moll. 'Fly!' she said, and faced Slip. Kathleen turned, and was gone; Knowles seized the woman, and somewhat pacified the dog; he drew her to the house, and straightway into the sitting room. Pickard rose, and said,

'By all that is evil, it is old Moll!'

'Yes!' answered she; 'I seek my daughter, and I know that she is here; let me see her! Is a poor mother to be kept away from her child? Where is the dog?'

'Here he is,' said Knowles, 'he will not hurt you.'

'Keep your eye on him then, for if he leaves your side he will kill me.'

'Never fear,' he said; 'down charge, good fellow, and be quiet.'

'Am I to see my daughter?'

'No,' answered the widow. 'No, certainly not—it would kill her.'

'Then I suppose I had better go.'

'Yes,' again spoke the widow; 'your daughter is here and will be well taken care of. You had better go.'

'So, Pickard,' said the gipsy, as she prepared to go, 'you have sold Rhoda to John Smith. I think you might share the swag with me.'

'Mother,' answered Pickard, 'just leave Rhoda alone. She is too good for you.'

'John Smith,' said old Moll, 'I am off; look well to your dog—if he follows me I will kill him. Pickard or John Smith, it is all one to me; but if either of you dares to marry Rhoda, her will I strangle.'

She left the room and the cottage; even as she expected, Kathleen was waiting in the thicket, and they together walked away. 'Now,' said old Moll, 'I have won your rewards; first, I have shown you, that John Smith is alive and well; next, I have made you to understand, who is his sweetheart. I expect payment.'

'You have won the reward, so far as John Smith himself is concerned; but I have not yet seen him with Rhoda. Of this I must make an absolute certainty; for his sweetheart, once found, dies—and dies as miserably as I can do it. I learnt the way from an Indian chief; moreover, in this I shall run some risk.'

'What more, my lady, can you want? He

risks a miserable death, in order to save Rhoda; spends money for her recovery; and is constantly in her bedroom. It would be difficult to get much stronger evidence.'

'Woman, you must let me be the judge. To-morrow I will re-visit the widow, and if possible see Rhoda, when John Smith is out. Yes, you must be again in the same thicket, and watch, so that I may be able to do all this safely.'

'My lady, the poor old gipsy woman will do anything you please. They separated. Kathleen returned home, meditating on all she had seen. She fully recognised John Smith, or rather Hilton, for by that name she always called him in her heart; she knew his peculiar ideas, to her once most strange; these she had now learnt to somewhat understand, since she had married, and mixed with refined people. She had also learned to appreciate his delicacy towards woman—his fastidiousness; and to feel that she never could be to him, but an object far below his love; all this caused her to long still more for him, and in proportion to hate him, and almost herself. No wonder that she could not, would not believe, that this man really loved a gipsy. Even if she had seen tender

passages between them, she would not have believed it: she would have called them flirtations, trifles, deceit, wickedness; but not a Hilton's love towards a woman. She had seen him daily, been with him at Docket's Store for weeks, he could laugh, pass a joke, do a kindness, and unwittingly soften many a heart; but love towards anyone she had never seen him show. To-morrow she determined to see Rhoda, see her beauty; she was well aware that fever must have temporarily disfigured her, but what then? She sighed, as she acknowledged, that to Hilton her very misfortune would be another bond of affection. She stretched her arms down on each side of her, clenched her hands, and walked towards home, absorbed in deep despair. All her plans, all her wealth, her very beauty and health, all added fuel to the fierce sorrow that burned within her. Never before had she thus felt; her pride, anger, and an uncontrollable longing for revenge had always raised her above despair; now she had given up all hope; what cared she for the dark night! what matter if the rain fell! what to her was the storm! She knew them not; at the garden wicket she stopped and sat on a fallen tree. She stretched her

arms and hands to their full length, and exclaimed, 'Oh! that lightning would kill me!' The fearful glare of electricity swept by; the thunder spoke—all was again dark and lonely. Kathleen bent her head down, laid her face on to her open hands, and wept. She wept, she knew not how long—then she sighed forth, 'Oh! for the tender sympathy of a kind heart!' and a soft voice close to her, answered,

'Let me share your grief.'

Kathleen felt as if in a nightmare. She raised her head and said, 'Is anyone near?'

Again the same soft voice answered, 'Rise up and lean on me. Come in, and let me share your sorrow.'

Weeping, half-fainting, she leaned for support, and said,

'Oh, how I have longed for kindness!'

Her companion led her towards the house. The brightness from windows roused her; her pride seemed to return; she drew herself up and asked,

'Who are you—so kind, so considerate to me?'

'Do you not know me?' answered the soft voice. 'I am Ethel Beal.'

'Ah!' said Kathleen, 'I fear I have been

very weak—very silly. I thank you. Now, let me walk alone.'

As they entered the hall, Ethel said to a servant,

'Request Mr Reily to go to dinner. We do not come down.

She led Kathleen to her room, and waited on her with the care of an elder sister, and saw to her comfort in every way. Time passed on, and, after some rest, Kathleen became herself again, and felt hungry.

'Ah!' she said, 'I can scarcely now call you Miss Beal. Your kindness has been really disinterested. Ah, how charming!'

'Call me Ethel,' was the answer. I have always considered you the hardest, the most reckless of women. Oh, think what pleasure to find you, even in sorrow, longing for sympathy! It was a friendship going a-begging and so I plucked the flower.'

'Ethel, I could almost love you. No one, no, not one, has been kind to me, without some selfish cause, some devilish reason. Ah me! yes, one, and one only, has ever been kind, and he hates me—kind to me merely because I am a woman; and because I am a wretched woman, hating me.'

'Then he,' said Ethel, 'is a mean being,

and no man. Believe me, he is not worth the words you have wasted on him.'

'Ah, if you did but know him! And yet,' said Kathleen, as she rose from her couch, 'Ethel, forgive me; you are not a wild girl as I am—forgive me! I thought, I hoped, yes, I with joy fully believed, that I had killed him.'

'Killed him!' exclaimed Ethel, 'think of the sin, think of repentance, and bitter remorse. No, say not "with joy." Turn to God with thanks, that you are still indeed innocent. Oh! look not so hard! lean on me, and weep.'

'Ethel, you whom I considered so cold, you will still be my comforter; but to love and be hated, think of it! to be despised, to know that all hope is gone; Ethel, have you ever loved?'

Ethel looked up with a strange surprise; with a deep blush, she gave a little laugh.

'Ah!' said Kathleen, 'you have answered, your look is enough. "I love," says your blush. Your laugh has added, "I am loved."'

'But is your love hopeless? Does he love another?'

'He does; and if I were fully convinced,

then I would seek his sweetheart, and kill her by some slow and terrible death. Look not so horrified; all other wickedness I might forego, but not revenge on her who has robbed me of him.'

'Oh, horrible!' said Ethel; 'even if he had once loved you, betrayed you, and loved another, still you should forgive him!'

'Listen! a few words will tell my grief. I met him, yes; I met Hilton in the wilds—in all, he was superior to all; others failed, and he succeeded; was true to a drunken friend, and brought him safely through, where safety seemed impossible; escaped from a mighty Indian chief, who never let anyone escape before; passed down a fearful river, on which man had never floated; took untold wealth to England, and gave it back to its owner, and all the while was kind and tender to everyone, and, alas! to me. Ah! that I never had seen him! I came to England, in order to get him hanged; yes, you may shudder, but I did. I came, and found him the great benefactor to this very man, whom I had sworn, that he had murdered. Ah! I have knelt to him; I have tried every thing, good and bad; I have lowered myself in his sight; he has looked at me with tender

compassionate eyes ; he has pitied me ; even now if I met him, he would look sadly at me and forgive me my would-be murder of him. But he would not love ! Ah, I almost believe I have found his sweetheart. He has risked his life to save her ; he has poured kindness on her ; he constantly waits on her in her bedroom ; and she is reported most beautiful. If I once am convinced of the truth, that woman dies ! Yes, she dies ! I will not forgive her. There is no power on earth that can rob me of my revenge ! ’

‘ You have spoken, and made me sad. ’

‘ Sad ! We are both sad. Think, consider ! I loved one who day by day won love from all. He seemed at first a mere seeker of gold, and day by day he became a greater and a greater man. He despised me, even when we first met. I swore his death, and he went free. I came to England, and traced him with difficulty. Again I tried to win his affection, again he cast me off, and I poisoned him. I thought him dead. To-day I again saw him. He is not what he seems to be, and has been. He is one of high degree—an Englishman of the highest type ; and I almost think he is not the poor man he plays at. He is tall, has fair, curly

hair, and eyes blue and beautiful, but, oh! their tender, pitying sad gaze; his soft musical, yet manly voice. Towards man he is firm and kind: a terror to his enemy; but towards woman he gives a deference, which is more manly than all else. To crown all, he bows as no other man can bow'——

'Has he a name?' interrupted Ethel. 'Such a man a true woman could love and lose, and yet forgive and love forever!'

'His name?' ejaculated Kathleen. 'His name was Hilton; now he plays at being a servant, and calls himself John Smith.'

'John Smith,' said Ethel softly; I know the man, an under-keeper; and who is his sweetheart?'

'Ah! that hated sweetheart. She is Rhoda, a gipsy girl.'

'Believe me, Kathleen, and do believe what I say, as this is the first time I ever called you Kathleen. I saw him and her this very afternoon, believe me, I do not think that he loves her, and I most assuredly believe that she does not love him, but another.'

'Tell me,' said the other, 'is she beautiful?'

'Not now; but by nature she is most lovely. I know not a more perfect outline; and the old widow, with whom she now

lives, says, that in health her complexion and eyes are wonderful; and her grace and winning ways indescribable; but she does not love John Smith. Come, our dinner waits—it is laid upstairs in the next room; so let us go to it.'

Kathleen rose, and again leaning on Ethel, walked the short distance. She felt tired and hungry, but food helped somewhat to restore her. The dinner was over; the hours had fled; they rose to part, and Kathleen said,

'If ever I have felt friendship, it has been this evening; and oh, how sweet. I forget, if ever I have kissed a woman! Let me kiss you!'

'One word; and kiss me, if you will. Tell me, how do you know, that I am to be trusted—that I am not an enemy, or rather one that you hate?'

'To-night I love you, oh, let me kiss you, it will bring comfort to my soul, for one night at least.'

'Then kiss me,' said Ethel, 'there, and now let me kiss you; and by that kiss, believe me, that even if you try to kill me, I will forgive you. Yes, and try to save you from your own wickedness.'

'That can never be,' answered Kathleen,

'for one so high, so good and pure as you, could never love John Smith.'

'Good-bye,' said Ethel, and Kathleen that night saw her no more.

The night was past, its deeds of innocence and crime were accomplished; bright morning woke Ethel and Kathleen; Ethel began her day's life with prayer and the Bible; Kathleen awoke with a strange feeling, half-pleasure, half-remorse; it was most pleasant to remember that Ethel from unalloyed kindness had been tender and interested in her; but again she had, in word let her plans of revenge and death pass into an incipient repentance; she now felt that it was impossible, and how rejoiced she became when she remembered that even in her softest moment the punishment by death, of Hilton's sweetheart, had never been given up, no, not for a moment. Her determination received strength through the very weakness of last night. The two ladies met at breakfast. Ethel had the same softness and sorrow for her companion, even the same as last night; and yet she knew and fully understood how fierce and unscrupulous would be the other's anger and revenge towards her whenever came the knowledge of

the fact that she herself, Ethel, was the lady-love of Hilton, of John Smith, of Mr Warren. She met Kathleen with a kiss; Kathleen returned it not.

‘I cannot kiss you,’ she said, ‘this morning; all my hate has returned; I would kill even you if you had crossed my path!’

‘Oh, Kathleen! if you in your youth had known God, what a happy, good-hearted woman you would have been.’

‘You are right,’ answered Kathleen; ‘I know not God, and do not wish to know him. I will die even as I have lived.’

‘And yet last night, Kathleen, you wept for sympathy, and longed for the fellowship of a tender heart.’

‘Ah! I called you Ethel, and kissed you; I wept, and felt as if I could be good—it is all gone now!’

‘Kathleen, say not so; try breakfast, and remember, it is the gift of God that you are not, even at this moment, suffering the agonies of death from hunger.’

‘What a strange creature you are, Ethel; let us change the subject. God cares not for one like unto me.’

‘God does; he has even numbered the hairs of your head.’

‘Ah!’ said Kathleen; ‘let it pass, while I thank the Chinese, for sending us such good tea.’

The breakfast passed on in silence; Kathleen, buoyed up by her animal spirits, once only broke the stillness.

‘How sad you are; but the sun and fresh air will put you right.’

‘I am sad, because I grieve for you.’

Kathleen gave a little laugh, and the voices ceased.

‘Now!’ at length Kathleen said, ‘I am off to gather flowers. Will you come with me?’

‘No!’ answered Ethel; no! give me a few moments, and put confidence in me. I will tell you of my love; and surely, if it should at all cross your path, you will try to forgive me?’

‘To hear of your love will be a treat, but if you cross my path I will not answer for my deeds.’

‘My cause is just, I will tell you all, and then leave you to meditate how strangely placed you and I are.’

‘Ah! I love anything and everything strange. I hate the dull monotony of everyday life in England, give me adventure, risk,

fierceness, wickedness, I cannot slack my thirst with ditch water.'

'Last night, Kathleen, you thought love and sympathy all in all.'

'Yes, and so I do now, if any real man would love me, nay, if he even only pretended to love me, and treated me with kindness and trust, I really believe I should live happily, and die contented, but there must be no sordid motive, no mere passion, but some affection or seeming affection, springing from an undoubtedly unselfish cause. If Hilton were dead, I could love another, such as I have just described. Had I known a mother, I should have been a good woman. I have no love, therefore I live on hatred.'

'Say not such awful things, Kathleen; I will love you, if you will let me.'

'Ah, let time show your love; now for your story.'

'It is very short. I will tell it, and leave you alone to meditate on its strangeness; remember, you said, that I was the only person, who ever loved you from disinterested motives.'

'You have raised my curiosity, do tell it me.'

'First, give me a kiss; let us kiss as

friends, it may be some time ere we again meet as such, but whatever happens, I now forgive you beforehand. Thank you, that has been a kiss of disinterested love. Now,' continued Ethel as she rose; 'I will not listen to your answer. I shall speak and go.' She gazed kindly on Kathleen, sighed, and added, 'Oh, that I could keep your love; I pray that an opportunity may happen, when I can prove to you my wish to love you, even in spite of your anger, and unkindness. I fear this is our farewell; Kathleen, answer me not. Kathleen, I am Hilton's lady-love.'

With a sad courage in her eyes, and dignity in her bearing, she slowly left the room; the door closed, her footsteps died in the distance. Kathleen had stood immovable. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes gleamed.

'I have said it, and will do it. Ethel, you die. Fool that I was, ever to kiss a woman; ere this good sun begins to sink, I will have settled everything. Now for that old hag; how lucky that I made an appointment.'

Kathleen strolled into the garden. Who, to see her, could have dreamed that one so lovely, so bright, apparently merely bent on flowers, had not only begun the gradual

accomplishment of one murder, and laid the plans for another, but even then was on the way to settle how to murder, with full revenge, and if possible to wreak it with horrid pain and suffering, on one whom last night she had loved and kissed. As she left the garden, she could not resist the temptation to once again sit on the fallen tree near the wicket, bow her head down on to her hands, and let the deeds of last night pass through her mind. She felt the impulse of better feelings; immediately she arose and cast aside what she considered a weakness. Denying to herself the opportunity for repentance, she hurried to where the old gipsy waited for her, and calmly said,

‘I was right and you were wrong; John Smith does not love Rhoda; he loves another.’

‘Impossible, my lady; it is Rhoda and no one else.’

‘I say he does not care for her; he loves another, and that other shall not live. I have longed for this moment, and it has come! Where are George Lee and his men?’

‘Gone, my lady, gone! I fear never to return!’

‘What! no men in your tents—none?’

‘No, not one—two or three boys and some women!’

‘Then these women must help; they shall be well paid.’

‘They will help you, my lady, but will not kill.’

‘I ask them not to kill: but will they bury?’

‘Yes, my lady, they will bury anything you wish!’

‘Good! will they bury Ethel Beal for me?’

‘What! Miss Beal of the Manor?—but if you pay heavily, and pay beforehand, it shall be done. Remember, pay beforehand.’

‘Go then, fetch me four stout wenches and some means of carrying Ethel; a litter, a door, a hurdle, anything long enough.’

‘Yes, my lady, all that is easily done; but what about payment?’

‘What do you ask?’

‘My lady, this is a dangerous deed; when done, we shall all have to run for it—strike our tents and not return to the pleasant Knowle for many years to come. Let us say one hundred pounds a-piece—five hundred in all.’

‘You covetous old hag! you highway

robber ! but go, fetch these women here at once. I shall walk, in about an hour's time, your way with Miss Beal ; you meet us. If all is ready, ask to tell her fortune, then I will cause her to faint ; take her and carry her away ; dig her grave out in the wild heath, where no one will dream of searching. How long will it take to dig a grave ? two feet deep will do.'

'One hour, my lady ; the four women will all work.'

'When Ethel Beal,' said Kathleen, 'faints, lay her on the litter, tie her hands together, and tie her to what she lies on, take her straight and quickly to your tent, never heed what she says, her mind will be wandering. If you meet anyone, answer, when questioned, "She is a gipsy girl dying of fever." At nightfall I will come and kill her ; then bury her quickly. The money I will also bring. If all goes well I will, when this year has come and gone, give you another hundred. Dare you come to fetch it ?'

'Yes, my lady ; in January I will again see you.'

'Good. Now to your work and fail not.'

They separated, and Kathleen again sought Ethel, whom she found, after a

time, just returning from a visit to Rhoda. 'Ethel,' she said, 'I fear that I was angry, very angry, with what you said; but, come, I must have fresh air. I do not feel quite well.'

'How kind you are, Kathleen. I will go up to see my uncle and change my dress, and soon be back to you. I must attend on my uncle, but I promise to take a stroll with you immediately afterwards.'

'I will wait here, Ethel, I have plenty of employment.'

Ethel went to her uncle's room, he was better, and on the high road to his former good health. She told him of all her doings through the morning, and even spoke of Rhoda and Pickard, and the kindness with which the widow treated them; but she could not bring her mind to mention John Smith; she had seen him, and he had assured her, that to-morrow he would come to Knowle Manor, and tell all to Mr Beal. She felt the happiest of women. When she rejoined Kathleen, she found her wandering up and down the drawing-room.

'Ethel,' she said; 'tell me, if you had many times sworn to yourself to do a thing and when the opportunity came, you did not

feel either the gratification, or the necessity of it—what in that case would be your course of action?’

‘In all and everything,’ answered the other, ‘I should consider if it be for good, or for bad. If good, I would not forego it—if bad, no power could compel me to it.’

‘You have no ideas, Ethel, but good and bad. Is there no such thing as pleasure or distaste?’

‘There are many things which may influence me; but first and foremost, I use the distinction between evil and right.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Kathleen; you always weary me, when you talk good, it vexes me. If I hesitated when about to do a harsh deed, your “namby-pamby” thoughts and words would compel me to do it. Come, let us take a stroll—my head aches.’

‘Let me first cool it with eau-de-cologne, does it not feel refreshing, I am so sorry for you, let us go out.’

The two went out together. Ethel put her companion’s silence down to illness. As they passed the wicket Kathleen stopped for a moment and said, ‘you are always kind and forgiving, if we ever meet in another world I wonder if you will forgive me?’

‘What a strange idea Kathleen, but whatever you do, you, Kathleen will I forgive in this world, and in the presence of God.’

‘Not so strange as it seems,’ answered Kathleen, ‘let us stroll along this drive, it appears to be cool and refreshing.’

They strolled on, and presently out of a side walk came a tall gipsy woman. She strode up to Ethel, and said, ‘Let me my pretty lady, tell you your fortune.’

Ethel turned from Kathleen, and towards the gipsy, a hand was passed from behind, and pressed on to her mouth and face a wet cloth, her consciousness left her, she fell into the arms of Kathleen, who merely said, ‘Quick with your work. Ah, that is well; now tie her wrists together, but not too tightly; fasten her round the waist to her couch. Now, women, one at each corner, lift together, not too hastily. Ah, that will do. Old Moll lead the way, and Moll, remember, trust her not; remember that although she would have inherited riches, now she does not possess a farthing. Moll, never lose sight of her, until she is buried. I will bring the money with me in a little more than an hour. Go on.’

The four gipsy women strode on; Kath-

leen watched the still figure that was being carried to the grave. She felt sad and serious, and was at a loss to find the cause; she was vexed that the sight did not bring her pleasure. Slowly she returned to the mansion and to her room. Then she deliberately refilled her flask with chloroform, and still more carefully inspected a small vial, that contained a strong soporific, which, according to the use, would ultimately allow the patient to recover, or sink into eternal sleep. She rang the bell, and stated that Miss Beal had gone out, and would not return until late; and that she herself was not well, and therefore going for a walk. She again passed out by the same way; without haste and without loiterings she walked through the woods. Down one drive in the distance she saw the head-keeper's lodge; she thought of Hilton, and smiled in hatred. Ere she was through the woodlands, evening closed over the landscape; when the expanse of heath lay before her, it could scarcely be distinguished from the sky. She walked cautiously and slowly; the short bark of a cur was most welcome; she had at length arrived at the gipsy encampment. Only three tents were there. Old Moll had spoken

truly when she had said that George Lee—Lying Lee—together with his fellows, had gone away. She drew nigh to the only tent in which was a light; she pressed the canvas on one side and gazed in. There sat old Moll watching the recumbent figure of Ethel, whose eyes were shut, and yet Kathleen saw that she was awake. Kathleen entered and sat down close to Ethel.

‘Ethel,’ she said, ‘listen to me.’

‘Are you come to free me? or was it you who reduced me to this sad state?’

‘It was I! Yes! hatred to Hilton’s lady-love still is mine; and now my revenge has come. To a certainty you die!’

‘Oh, Kathleen, think what a wickedness you now wish to commit.’

‘Tut, fair Ethel, think that after a time John Smith will forget you, and I may have a chance, nay, almost without a doubt I shall marry him, and live happily, he and I together, loving and beloved. What think you of that?’

‘Nay, Kathleen, repent while you have time. I would wish to live, but if I must die, I will pass away in prayer for you and trusting in a Saviour.’

‘Ah, Ethel, again you vex me. Think,

remember, we shall not kill you, we shall bury you !'

'What mean you? Bury me and not kill me! Why, that is many deaths in one. The thought is horrible!'

'It is; and nevertheless so it will be! Old Moll, is her grave dug, and all ready? Old Moll nodded her head, and Kathleen resumed, 'Ethel, your time is come. Yes, strain on your wrists, it is of no avail, a thong of leather holds them; you are tied to your couch. Ethel, farewell! Some day I will tell Hilton how you died, but not until he is past all regret for you, through years of love towards me. He will merely smile and kiss me. Ethel, farewell! I shall now use chloroform, and so arrange matters that you will not awake until you are in the grave. Old Moll, take this bag and count the money.'

'I will take it on trust; you dare not cheat me; your life, as well as ours, are this night risked.'

'Ah, well said the old hag, are the women at hand?' again old Moll nodded, and Kathleen continued; 'Then all is ready; Ethel your living death has begun.' She poured chloroform on to a cloth, and held it to Ethel's face, there was a struggle, but in

vain. Kathleen waited a little ; then, when the other drew her breath, she opened the vial, and poured its contents into Ethel's mouth, it was swallowed, and all was still. Four women at a call from old Moll, raised the canvas at each end of the tent, lifted the motionless form, and when outside, followed the old gipsy woman through the dark night, out on to the lonely heath. Kathleen left the tents slowly, for she felt ill ; feelings that she knew not seized her ; she rested, then again continued her homeward way, but several times she almost fainted, she wondered at the suddenness of her pains. Arrived at the mansion, she with difficulty reached her room. She had tea and some refreshments placed in the adjoining boudoir, soon afterwards she sent her maid away, and merely said, ' I am tired, so do not come near me unless I ring, I shall be well to-morrow.'

The maid bade her good-night, and left the room. Kathleen locked the door, then quietly and deliberately took from a hitherto locked wardrobe all she needed. The clothing she arranged on and near the bed, she also placed on a table near, several flasks taken from her dressing case, then she lay down to rest.

On that very same day that now was past,

Warren Knowles had met Ethel, and after they had together seen that all was arranged to meet Rhoda's wants, and again thanked the widow for her care, they had strolled along the glades, with his left hand he led her horse and she leaning on his right arm, nestled close to his breast. It was a paradise. When within sight of the mansion, she with his help mounted, rode home, met Kathleen, saw to her uncle's comfort, and in an evil hour went out with her companion to the woods.

Warren Knowles was walking at a rapid pace towards the keeper's lodge; night was at hand; in the distance he heard a loud cry, as if someone called to another. He stopped to listen, and then continued his speed. Again and again the voice sounded, and nearer. He once more halted; he distinctly heard the words 'John Smith.' So, having placed a hand on each side of his mouth, he answered with a loud 'here, here!' He leant on his stick and waited. In about a minute again came the loud and now very near cry of 'hilloa!' To this he again replied; he wondered at the tone of the voice, and his curiosity was excited. Out of the wood ran a human being; even in the increasing darkness he saw it was not a man,

and yet the voice was scarcely a woman's. Close to him the human being stopped, and scanned his face and appearance.

'You are John Smith. Do you remember me?'

Knowles looked, and although he somewhat recognized the voice, he was in total oblivion so far as the face and figure.

'Whom did you catch at the fairy glen? He with a sprained ankle?'

'I caught Rhoda's brother.'

'Yes, and you carried him to the "Stag and Pheasant."'

'I did; but are you then that same boy?'

'I am! it was a small piece of rock, not a pebble, nor any well-worn stone that I sent down the dingle, and betrayed myself.'

'True, but if you are Rhoda's brother, what now do you want?'

'I am Rhoda's brother; believe me by the same token that has brought belief once before. I saw your parting with the lady. I saw her mount her horse without help; I saw her bend down towards you, and when she held out her hand, you placed on it the bridle of your own tired horse. She went away and never looked back.'

‘Yes! now I believe, you are Rhoda’s brother.’

‘I am! and did I not promise, if you would help and save sister, to be faithful to you as your dog?’

‘You did—I remember it all, and now recognise you.’

‘You are sure, that I am Rhoda’s brother?’

‘I am.’

‘Then let us not waste another word. Your sweetheart lies bound, and hounded in mother’s tent. Mag and three others have nearly dug her grave—even now they are about to, or have perhaps again drugged her; and mark this, John Smith, then they bury her alive! ask no questions, but come, give me your hand, and help me along; I cannot run like you, and you cannot find her without me—take my hand, fear not to hurt me; only on at your greatest speed.’

‘Do your best, boy,’ said Warren Knowles, and leading, nay, lifting and throwing forward the boy, he dashed on at a pace few men could have equalled—occasionally the boy gasped out, ‘this way!’ and still onward was their course. Exhausted, breathless, Rhoda’s brother never tried to check their speed; but speechless he waved his

hands and pointed the way. Through the wood, across the heath, down recklessly through the night, into dingles, and up again, without stint or stay ; at last the boy pointed to an object, which loomed doubtfully just below them ; with one bound, yet without losing his hold of the boy, Knowles was on it. 'Where is she?' exclaimed Knowles ; 'say, where, or die.' He let the boy drop on to the heath, drew out and cocked his revolver. There was a dead silence. 'Help me ! Oh help !' came from a half-stifled voice ; it sounded at his feet, he let go his hold of old Moll, who fled ; bending in agony, he uttered, 'Oh speak again ! speak !' he had recognised the voice of Ethel. Oh, the century of agony in that second, would it never end ; 'Help,' again sounded, but very faint, yet it was enough, quickly, most cautiously he raised the loose heather sods, his hands felt the face and long hair of her he loved so well, soon he raised her head and listened, so long was all still that he felt despair for her life, but at length one gentle sigh, so gentle, so low, that had not his ear been close, it would have been unheard ; but it was heard, and Knowles felt as if the strength of seven mighty men had been by that sigh breathed

into him. He placed a heather sod beneath her head, and careless of hurts and broken nails, he worked regularly, continuously, and sometimes even fiercely, until he could draw her forth from her living grave. He knelt, and raised her body, when Rhoda's brother said.

'Give me a cup or something, I will get water.'

Knowles answered not, but gave to the boy the cup from the flask he carried. The water was brought, he applied the fresh liquid to Ethel's lips, again she sighed, and leaning back she seemed to sleep. He placed his ear nigh to her mouth, and although he failed to detect the slightest sound, he plainly felt the breath of life. He mixed a small quantity of spirits with water, and washed her lips; he waited, he listened, in vain he felt her heart, he chafed her hands. She inhaled a longer breath, and renewed hope came back to him; still he supported her, and let the anxious time flow on; at last she drew another and still deeper breath, tried to raise her head, and to his intense relief, she opened her eyes. Dark as it was, he saw them; and almost too thankful to speak, he whispered, 'Ethel, it is I,

Warren,' she spoke not, and yet, through the sympathy between them, he was convinced that she thanked him. He raised her as if she had been a mere child; laid her head on his shoulder, and winding his strong arms around her, as supports, he turned to carry her away.

'Boy, show me the nearest way to the keeper's lodge, and by a path.'

'Yes, Mr Smith; our old road from the encampment; there is no one there now: follow me.'

Some hundred yards along the slope brought them to where once the tents had been; now not a soul was there, not even Old Moll's tent and cur, no vestige of gipsy life. Speedily yet cautiously he went, all care bestowed on his precious burden. They reached the keeper's dwelling, and Knowles stood not on the ceremony of knocking; he entered at once and called to Mrs Brooks, who, candle in hand, met them in the passage and opened the door of his own room for him.

'Mrs Brooks,' he said, 'I have saved Miss Beal almost from death; we must both do our best for her. I hope your new servant is handy and quick?'

‘Lay her on the bed, sir; I will call Betsy.’

Betsy was soon there, and while she and Mrs Brooks attended to Ethel, Knowles made up the kitchen fire, saw that water was warmed, and knowing the habits of its mistress, found the ground-coffee. Soon the pleasant fumes spread around, and ere long, Mrs Brooks had seen Ethel take some of the liquid, a strong antidote to most poisons. To Knowles this was a welcome piece of information. When Brooks, the head-keeper, appeared, he at Knowles’ request went out and saddled his cob while Knowles sat down and wrote three notes. He then went out and met the keeper half-way on his return to the house.

‘Here are three letters, Brooks. Go first of all to Doctor Crofts; if at home, ask him if you can go on; but if he is not at home you must find Doctor Brownlow and send him here at once. Next, go to the Manor, give this letter to Antlett, the coachman, and tell him you are going to prepare Mrs Oldham, the housekeeper, for a drive to this lodge, and give to her this third note. Stay at the Manor until you have seen all this done, and also wait there for my return.’

The keeper put the cob into a smart trot, and was soon out of sight and hearing.

Meanwhile Ethel became more herself, but could not get rid of the heavy drowsiness. By Knowles' wish Mrs Brooks again gave her coffee. Knowles sat by the kitchen fire, anxious to hear the arrival of Dr Crofts. In the midst of his anxiety he was careful of Rhoda's brother, he gave Yess a large bowl of coffee and milk with a proportionate hunch of bread, and was pleased to see the boy, his appetite satisfied, stretch himself on the settle and sleep. Within a short interval, one of the other, the housekeeper and the doctor arrived. The latter having been apprized by the letter of the state of the case, had brought what remedies were needed, so that after some considerable time the carriage was ordered to the door, and Ethel under the care of both housekeeper and doctor started to the Manor. Knowles travelled outside. Nothing interfered with the safety of their journey, and Ethel was once more brought to her own room, and pronounced to be in no danger. Knowles had bidden her a Good-night, while he had helped her to ascend the staircase—but he loitered, near her room, in order to have the

very last report from the doctor, with whom he, for some time, sauntered up and down the passage.

‘Hark!’ suddenly exclaimed Knowles; ‘what curious noise is that?’

‘It was nothing to signify!’ answered Doctor Crofts, after a slight pause—‘a rat caught in a trap, or a mouse in the claws of a cat!’

‘No! it was some strange sound; like a young dog, in distress, or a small wild animal, when it finds escape impossible.’

They listened; Crofts was about to break the silence, but Knowles held up his hand; like an old sportsman, he knew the value of continued stillness. They listened in patience; then came a cry, a wail, so low, so small, that but for their thorough quietness, it would have been unheeded. It ceased.

‘Is that a slight cry close to us, or is it one lessened almost to nothing by distance? It surely cannot come from her room?’

‘No,’ Crofts answered; ‘there you may rest easy. She has suffered no injury, and will soon be completely well.’

‘I am convinced,’ said Knowles, ‘that it came from this room. Let me try the handle: it is locked. Doctor, there was something

in that cry that jarred on my brain. I could not sleep without trying to hunt it up. The servants are all in bed, and thus no means of inquiry. Doctor, you must wait for me here. I know of another entrance to this room, seldom used, and no doubt unknown to the present occupant. I will act discreetly ; just stay here until my return.'

'I will ; you may depend on my patience.

'You see, doctor, even a poor rat in a trap should not be left to a night of agony.'

Knowles hurried down stairs into the dining-room, shut the door, walked across, pressed the small panel, inserted his hand, passed in, and closed all behind him. He hastened along the narrow secret passage, to him well known, he stopped not until he stood at the wall of the bed-room which he sought. He listened, all was still, he opened the small panel and looked in, there were two wax candles alight on a table near the bed, so silent, so motionless was all within, that he hastily entered, he approached the bed, there lay Mrs Greville, pale and apparently insensible. He strode to the door, he opened it, but could not speak, he beckoned to the doctor, and the two went silently in together. The medical man pressed his hand on to her heart, listened

to her breathing, and having brought a hand-glass, held it to her lips. 'I believe she is dead' he said, and then ran to his own room, and returned with restoratives. All in vain, Mrs Greville, once the wild, beautiful Kathleen O'Byrne had ceased to live. Once again came the slight wail, the same as the cry, which at first had startled them in the passage. They turned, and there on an arm-chair, wrapped in a cashmere shawl, lay a baby. The doctor stretched out his hand, and gently removed the upper portion of the covering, and lo! around its neck was knotted a cambric handkerchief; not one moment did he hesitate; he quickly took a sharp instrument from his case, cut the handkerchief, and withdrew it from the infant's neck. Then on their senses flashed a horror, a deep revulsion; before them lay a woman, who, with her dying hands, was the would-be murderess of her newly born child.

'Alas!' said the doctor, 'she has died through exhaustion. What folly in her to remain alone. We can do nothing for her. Now we must think about this poor child. Mr Knowles, fetch the housekeeper, but do not alarm Miss Beal.'

While the doctor again examined Mrs Greville, Knowles hastened to Ethel's room ; at his slight tap, the housekeeper came out, and unquestioned, said,

‘ She is well, and sleeps.’

‘ Then come with me to the doctor—he has need of you.’

They entered. ‘ There is no hope,’ Crofts said, pointing to Mrs Greville ; life is utterly extinct, but we must care for this small orphan ; see, Mrs Oldham.’

She gazed in amazement, clasped her hands, and would have raised the child.

‘ Wait a little,’ he continued—‘ where can we put it ? It requires attention, and warmth—warmth above all things. It seems weak ; it has suffered since its birth.’

‘ Let me leave it where it is with you, doctor ; and I will, as quickly as I can get for it a comfortable and already inhabited room.’

She left on her errand of kindness.

‘ Mr Knowles, a strange conviction has occurred to me. Mrs Greville must have kept all this secret, in order to destroy her child—see the red mark is still round its neck ; it is possible, that having made the attempt, her bodily weakness, or maternal

love bade her desist, and perhaps repent. Such things have been.'

'She is dead,' said Knowles; 'and the child lives. True or untrue, you can never decide; so we had better leave the matter alone, and never again mention such a thought. It is very sad!'

'But, Mr Knowles, it involves a further deduction. If she did all this with premeditation, and had long since determined to kill her newly-born child, she must have made arrangements with some confederate, or mercenary being, to remove the dead infant—what say you? Was she not too clever, too much a woman of the world, to do all this on the spur of the moment? So depend on it, someone else is, more or less, also guilty of all this, her death, and the attempt on the baby.'

'Your thoughts and mine are at one! Can we not find a clue?'

'It will be difficult,' the doctor answered; 'but time is a wonderful unraveller of mysteries! Let us not forget this suspicion.'

With serious thoughts and saddened brows, they watched the tender child. They watched and spoke not; they felt the presence of death. Mrs Oldham returned, and having

wrapped the infant in a large thick flannel well warmed, removed it from its dead mother's room.

'So ends an eventful life!' exclaimed Knowles; 'some day, doctor, I will tell you much of her early life. I knew her in America.'

'An old acquaintance, hey?' answered the other. 'We must get some rest; let us go, or the sun will take us by surprise. Our rooms are near together, so I will call you at an early hour. Come along.'

The doctor, as they left the room, observed to Knowles:

'It is odd and looks like intention, but with a lock and two bolts on the inside, there is merely a latch handle on the outside. I daresay it will do for one night, as I shall see to it early to-morrow; a few hours of sleep are enough for me. In the meantime I leave a lamp alight; it is an old superstition, and this time may be of use.'

Late on this same night, Jack Reily came back to Knowle Manor from a merry dinner with some neighbouring squires. He had drank just enough to pleasantly excite his brain and develope wit, he had moreover achieved good luck at billiards; although now

a rich man he still rejoiced over winnings, it was a success, a thing dear to all. The evening had been finished with a dance, and he had felt that his dress, grace, and whole appearance were far above the company present. Some slight flirtations and tenderesses he had accepted, as almost his due, and they helped to rouse his vanity and consciousness of superiority. His departure was like a Prince's, ladies and gentlemen saw him to his carriage, and as he drove off a parting cheer met his ear. On his way back to the Manor he had pleasing meditations on his gains, and the beauties who had smiled on him. Two had been more particularly charming, but as he mentally recalled their features, Kathleen returned to his memory, and he gave her the palm over all. On her his thoughts rested; all the past and the future were full of pleasure. He had wealth; she not only was at the present time rich, but would soon be in possession of a large jointure—moreover he considered her the handsomest woman, save one, whom he had ever seen; that one exception was Ethel Beal; on her his thoughts dwelt for a few moments, not warmly, but even as a mortal admires the 'Venus de Medici,' or the portrait of a beauty long

since dead; then suddenly he forgot her, and reverted with enthusiasm to Kathleen's perfections, and impassioned soul. The carriage stopped, he jumped out; his first question was, 'Are any ladies or gentlemen still in the drawing-room or billiard-room?' The negative answer was a disappointment; but even as he loitered up the staircase, the hall clock struck two. Having soon dismissed his valet, he sought his couch, but could not sleep; again came the vivid likeness of Mrs Greville; he tried to wrench it from his mind; he longed for sleep. Once only he fell into a slumber, from it he started into consciousness, and sprang from his bed. Was it a dream, or was Kathleen actually in his presence, and with tears trickling down her cheeks, and bitter sobs, beseeching him to save her from sin? A glance told him the truth, he was alone, and yet so strongly was he impressed by the seeming vision, that he unwittingly attired himself, and having drawn his dressing-gown round him, he left his room. His whole soul possessed by one dominant impulse, he hastened along; a deep silence was over all; his lamp scarcely penetrated the darkness around. Arrived at the door which he

sought, he knocked; no answer came, all was still; he tried the handle, it yielded, within a light shone, he entered, the door closed gently behind him, he looked, all spoke of a place inhabited by a lady, and yet where was she? Through the night some distant clock struck three; he thought, 'How silent and cold.' Then the idea arose, that Kathleen might in light-heartedness, have hidden herself, and so he peered all around, and almost hoped suddenly to see her bright face, and to hear her light laughter.

'Kathleen,' he softly uttered, 'where are you?'

He perceived that in the bed apparently lay a form with a coverlet drawn over the head. With cat-like step, a smile on his lips, and fun in his expression, he quickly strode forward; he laid his hand on the covering and exclaimed,

'Aha, Kathleen, you are found out! Surrender.'

With a word of merriment he drew the coverlet from off her face, and leant forward to impress a kiss; no love—no Kathleen was his; death—dead Mrs Greville lay there!

Long, very long, he stood as petrified; he

seemed to live his life over again ; thoughts crowded on thoughts, sorrow, half-repentance, wonder, horror ; his hands and feet felt a strange coldness ; his brain reeled ; in very weakness he sank down on to the bedside ; still he gazed on what had lately been a being, full of quick intelligence, and overpowering determination ; and, oh, how beautiful, aye, and still beautiful even in death. With his eyes fixed on that face, time he heeded not, its sadness, its sweetness, weighed down all his senses ; for once he felt his own sinfulness, his selfishness, how he had lured a soul to dire wickedness, and then, contrary to its longing to be free, had kept it captive to his power ; where was now that soul ? his conscience told him, that what was made for heaven, he remorselessly had doomed to hell. He had always known good from evil ; Kathleen as a child knew naught, and the road to purity or impurity were equally open to her, he had fouled her mind, and instructed her in all wickedness. All hope was gone, the impossibility of prayer on him was fearful ; verily his sin had found him out, the agony of these hours was like the torture of eternity. What he had done, was past recall ; on all

his heartless teaching, on all her deeds, death had set its seal.

‘ Oh ! Kathleen, give me once again but ten minutes of your life.’ A strange hope—a hope against hope, oftentimes felt by a mourner—came to him, he passed his hand to her heart, no beat was there, no pulse of life, he raised her right hand, bitter remorse and a hitherto unknown sentiment forbade him to touch her lips, he let his last farewell be a kiss on her lifeless hand, it was his first feeling of real tenderness to her, his first reverence towards God, he held that hand in his, he moaned, he knew that it was the last time ; he gently replaced that hand by her side, a slight pause, he withdrew his hand and wondered how his life could remain in him ; he turned his eyes into his own hand, and there, given by dead Kathleen lay a paper, he unfolded it, his glazed eyes with difficulty read : ‘ Jack, I never was so ill before, a feeling of death is on me. The baby What I have sworn I will do ; Jack, this is all your wickedness ; This perhaps is “ Good-bye for ever.” Happen what may, mind Jack you take care of’

No more ! he gazed still on that face ; five minutes ! five days ! five years ! eternity ! he

gazed, and all was not ! a hand rested on his shoulder.

‘Mr Reily,’ said a subdued voice ; ‘awake from sorrow ! Let me help you to rise.’

Slowly he turned his head, and his dim eyes met the inquiring look of Doctor Crofts ; he pointed to Kathleen, and whispered,

‘Dead !’

Again he turned towards that soft sad face, and his soul seemed lost in contemplation.

‘Arouse yourself, Mr Reily, you must come away !’

The doctor took his ice-cold hand, and showing sympathy by word and deed, brought him to his feet.

‘Nay, remain erect,’ he continued ; take your last look at that beautiful face ! let me again cover it ! now, come ; I will see you to your room.’

In silence they proceeded, and the medical man perceived that the other’s senses and self-possession were returning ; so much was this the case, that at the turning of a passage, Jack Reily stopped and said, ‘Thank you much, doctor, for your kindness, I am almost myself again, it has been a great shock, but I can now find my

own way Let us say, "Good-night," or rather "Good-morning." I will not trouble you further.' They separated, the doctor watched Reily until he had reached his own room, and shut the door. Jack Reily entered, a light was there, at odds with the dawn of day; he started with a feeling of horror, he almost expected to meet the violet eyes of Kathleen. A word was spoken, and he was himself again, the cold and selfish worldly man.

'I have sat here,' said Puritas Toogood, 'for a long time. I knew that you had returned; and all goes well. This morning Doctor Crofts came to see Mr Greville, whose pulse he felt more carefully than is usual, and inquired about many extra symptoms. At length he appeared to feel satisfied; for addressing his patient, he said, "I have news that may be a joy to you, but it may in some degree be also a surprise. Have you lately had any confidential talk with Mrs Greville?" "None," Mr Greville answered, "none, and wish for none." "But," continued Doctor Crofts, "what I have to communicate should be a great pleasure to you." "Oh," said Mr Greville, 'is old Beal dead?' The doctor was as

man who had seen and been through much, and yet the strangeness of this question did certainly astonish him. "No. I do not come to announce a death, but a birth." "A birth!" exclaimed Greville. "I do not know of any birth that can affect me." "Think again," answered the doctor, "have you not a wife?" "Yes—no; both yes and no. But what has that to do with it?" "Simply, that last night Mrs Greville was confined of a daughter." Mr Greville stared at the doctor, and presently said; "What an old fool you must be. Let me sleep," and having turned round, he lay still as if sleep were on him. The other shrugged his shoulders, nodded to me, and left the room. "Nurse," at once said Mr Greville, "do you know whereabouts is Mr Reily's room?" To my answer in the affirmative he added, "Then fetch him: I must see him immediately;" and so, sir, here I am. Will you follow me to your friend?"

Reily poured out a full tumbler of water; with a steady hand he drained it.

'Come along, quick! I also wish to see him, and to mark how your nursing has acted. Come at once!'

Soon they reached and entered Mr Greville's room.

'Here I am. I came as quickly as I could at your call; luckily I was not asleep, for I was late at a dinner and dance given by Squire Thistlemead.'

'Ah, no doubt you all enjoyed yourselves, while I lie here like a wounded hare. Have you heard what happened last night?'

Reily struggled hard to maintain his calmness; nevertheless, an unwonted paleness spread over his face, and his eyes gleamed curiously at his companion.

'Ah, I believe you have heard it—a baby born. An old dunderhead came to congratulate me—me!—because Mrs Greville has a baby! You and I know better. Now, Jack, you are the only one here that I can trust: will you promise, on your honour, to write by this morning's post? Write and order down my own lawyer: he must immediately come.'

'Yes,' answered Jack; I promise, but what is in the wind now?'

'A divorce; and more, that child is not mine; I can prove it. What say you to that?'

'Simply, that you are a rich man, and can

do what you please ; even indulge in the luxury of fattening the lawyers.'

'Ah, Jack, easy to laugh at me ; you are well and happy, while I moan over my fate, and long for that which will never come.'

'Tut, tut ! you will be all right some day, have patience.'

'I have had patience, since that night when I made up my mind to look well into all our past expenses, I have done nothing but groan ; and day by day become worse and worse.'

'Gad,' exclaimed Reily ; 'You must get the lawyers to pray for you, for once you set to work, they will be at a premium. Divorce, non-access, inspection of accounts, half-a-dozen lawsuits at the same time ! Gad ; you must live, if it is only for the fun of the thing.'

'I will if I can, although the odds now seem against me.'

'The night is past, and the morning sun begins to shine, so, Greville, you must excuse me if I plead weariness and hasten to my bed. I will see you again in the afternoon. Good-bye.'

Reily nodded, and sauntered out of the room. When the half-opened door was between him and the sick man, he waved his

hand to Puritas Toogood, and beckoned her to follow. This signal he made slowly and deliberately, he waited until she joined him in the passage.

CHAPTER VI

IN the meanwhile Warren Knowles had long since risen, and after a conversation in the library with Doctor Crofts, he got up to leave the room.

‘Remember,’ said the doctor, ‘Mr Reily will require to be watched, he may get up this afternoon, perhaps refreshed and well, but on the other hand, the shock that he has received, may tell on him ; and no one now can foresee the consequences. Next time you meet him, draw on one side ; and mark him, when he thinks himself alone—it will be a charity. He might even go mad. If he is wise, he by this time should

be fast asleep ; but again he may be restless, and working himself into a fever—so when he is not aware of it, and better still, if he does not know of your presence, observe his looks and words.'

'Thank you, doctor ; I will do it ; and to begin, I will go up now, and see what he is doing.'

So saying, Knowles left the library, and proceeded up stairs. It happened, that just as he emerged from the landing place, into one end of a corridor, Jack Reily, at the other end, opened the door of Greville's room. Knowles, remembering the late conversation with the doctor, slipped behind the passage door, in order to scan the other's face and expression. Through the crevice at the hinges, he watched Reily ; but to his regret Puritas also came ; silently the two approached him, until on the landing they stopped ; Reily looked over the bannister, and listened ; then turning to the nurse, he said,

'We are here, perfectly alone ; nevertheless we must not be long, lest some eaves-dropper should intervene. Say, how is Greville ?'

'In our hands completely, if you wish it,

‘he can go in an hour, or dwaddle on as long as suits you.’

‘Good! let him be gone before mid-day. Let me not be disturbed, for I am not well. A few words more; how do you propose to give him his marching orders?’

‘His medicine is due. Sometimes he refuses it, and then I mix it in his tea or coffee. One way or the other, I am sure of him.’

‘You are a first-rate nurse, Puritas, so do your duty, and I will double your premium; now go.’

Reily hurried away, entered his own bed-chamber, and having turned the key in the lock, he slowly undressed; occasionally he ceased and was lost in thought, then he would rally himself and continue. Mentally he said, ‘I feel ill and flurried, I could not have believed that Kathleen’s death would have so much affected me; it is a strange termination to her life, but it was not my fault; how could I have acted otherwise. Oh, that calm face, so beautiful, so full of horror.’ Then after a time he looked at a mirror. ‘Hang it, how like a ghost I appear; this will never do; I must sleep, even if I take an opiate to cause it. Let me have no more of these memories;

they will drive me mad. Rouse yourself, Reily, and be a man.'

He selected the key of his despatch-box, unlocked it, and then thrust his hand down the right side just the same as Mrs Greville had done a few days before, brought up the same small parcel, undid it, and then raised the lid of the same small box it contained, removed two pilules, and replaced all, even as it had previously been. When ready for bed, he poured out a glass of water; then taking the two pilules in the fingers of his left hand, he again gazed at himself in the mirror, nodded, and said; 'Here is to your better health, Reily, my lad, and a long and pleasing journey to Mr and Mrs Greville,' and here he paused; then with a forced laugh, he added; 'and equally good wishes to that interesting fellow that I see in the looking-glass.'

He placed the pilules into his mouth, and swallowed them and the water from the tumbler. He replaced the glass, let the heavy curtains down over the window, reclined on his couch and slept. He had said no prayer, no misgiving had been his; he had lain down, in his self-reliance, a scornful and unbelieving man. He slept; and from

that sleep he shall not awake until the day of judgment. Meanwhile, Knowles had remained hidden until Puritas had descended the staircase and all had become silent. He drew a long breath, but not for one small moment did he remain irresolute ; even while Reily yet spoke, his decision had been made ; so he hastened to Greville's room ; he did not knock, he went in and walked straight-way up to the bed.

‘Who are you, sir, that have the impertinence to enter in that way, and not knock nor wait permission.’

‘I believe I am not known to you. Excuse me if I go at once to my object ; time is short, pray, listen, your life may depend on it. This morning I have discovered that you are likely to die of poison. Ah, no wonder that you feel surprised. I am Warren Knowles, the son of him who owns this mansion. Your nurse will be here in a few minutes ; refuse the medicine ; it is poison, and mark this, tell her to leave it on the table by the bedside, and say, you wish for breakfast. When breakfast is ready, ask her to fetch more sugar, or more milk, more anything ; once she is out of the room, I will be here, I shall give orders, and others

will attend you. You must never again be left with Puritas Toogood. Do you appreciate what I say?’

‘I do, yes, I believe you. I have felt, and now feel that your words must be true. I will act as you have advised. Go, lest we should be baulked of our intentions.’

Knowles left the room, he passed Puritas Toogood on the stairs. She wished him Good-morning. He found the doctor still in the library, quickly and shortly he related all that had happened; ‘And now, doctor, come with me, for you are, while I am not, acknowledged as a man of authority in this house.’

They went to the breakfast-room, where the butler was arranging the table, and to him the doctor gave all necessary instructions. This done, they together walked to the sick man’s room, and found that Puritas had just brought the breakfast. ‘What! no appetite,’ exclaimed the doctor, ‘come, eat, or you will never get well. What night has he had, nurse?’ To all questions were given satisfactory answers; and the nurse left them alone.

‘Mr Greville,’ said the doctor, ‘I have reason to believe that this gentleman has saved your life. He has told me all, so you

must have nothing more to do with that woman. I will secure this medicine, and the whole of the breakfast, by simply locking it into this cupboard; I wish to sift all this wickedness, and have it punished. There, and now we can talk at our leisure. First, let me introduce you to Mr Warren Knowles, the son of the owner of this estate; to him we owe your present safety. In a short time the butler will announce that Miss Puritas Toogood is gone, and that he has told off an experienced man to wait on you.'

'Do you mean to say,' said Greville, 'that I really have just escaped death by poisoning? Why, I will hang her if I can! aye, and all others concerned in this cowardly plot. Is Reily in it?'

'He is,' answered Knowles. 'We have sent to the head constable, so that Reily may be secured; and then we will see about your nurse also.'

'I tell you what it is,' continued Greville, 'I feel better already; if I had a good breakfast I could get up and dress. What say you, doctor?'

'That here comes the butler to announce that the coast is clear; and here also comes a servant with a good and unpoisoned repast.'

Set to; the man will wait upon you. We shall go down and follow your wise example.'

The forenoon passed quietly. The coroner was communicated with on the subject of Mrs Greville. The doctor paid another visit to Greville, and helped him out of bed, but on account of weakness would not allow him to remain long. In the afternoon the chief-constable arrived, he and Mr Beal, in his capacity of county magistrate, inquired into and took evidence on the case, when Mr Beal signed a warrant for Reily's apprehension. To their inquiry all was reported silent in his room, and that Reily slept. Attended by two policemen, they proceeded to the door and knocked, no answer was returned, again and again they summoned him, no voice, no sound was heard.

By their chief's command the two policemen soon forced an entrance, he and Mr Beal went in.

'Mr Reily, I scarcely think that you can be asleep, I daresay you guess why I am come, and I much regret the occasion.'

Still Mr Reily responded not. The chief-constable went forward and shook his shoulder.

'Mr Beal, and you also policemen, come

here, look at Mr Reily ; Yes, it is even so, Mr Reily is dead. Walters, go down and bring up Dr Crofts. We must let the medical man see him just as we found him.'

Doctor Crofts was soon there, and after a short inspection pronounced that Reily had been dead some hours, but could not assign any cause of death. The chief-constable left the mansion, and said he would return to-morrow, together with the coroner. Mr Beal was duly introduced to Warren Knowles by the doctor, who, having again seen Greville, quickly went off on a round of visits to his numerous patients in the neighbourhood.

'Mr Beal, I am delighted at length to make your acquaintance, for although you have been our tenant now some years, still we have never met.'

'Yes, Mr Knowles, it is also a great pleasure on my side ; I may say a very great pleasure indeed. I have been into all my affairs ; my head-manager has been here ; he has shown me his accounts and a copy of the receipt he gave you for enormous sums of money. I can never thank you enough. I am quite at a loss to understand what reason

you could possibly have had for your kindness to me.'

'I had one great reason ; and I also had a joy, in outdoing two as clever villains, as ever tried to ruin an honest man. It was sharp work, and no time to waste. Luckily I had large sums at my bankers, and almost unlimited credit ; so I had only to play a straightforward game, and victory was ours. How your manager looked at me ! I shall never forget ! he has himself acknowledged, that at first he considered it all some gigantic swindle ; and even after he had received peremptory notice to pay certain outstanding obligations, he still doubted me ; the only thing that reassured him, and put him completely at his ease, was the reception given me by my bankers, and the promptitude with which the monies were forthcoming. On that day, when all was paid, and the misfortune to you averted, I almost thought that he would go mad. I never, in my life, saw such a bad case, and I have seen several, of fear and emotion, after all danger had ceased. I gave him a good lunch, and when the bank was closed, made him, on one pretence and another, walk about with me, until he was fairly tired out. He told me

afterwards, that he had been so weary, that he utterly forgot all else, but a desire for rest.'

'It is quite refreshing to hear you talk, but I should very much like to hear the names of these two clever villains, for not only had they brains, but good command of cash.'

'One is dead; the other I wish you to forgive. Say that you will bear no enmity against him who lives, and I will give you their names.'

'Well, Mr Knowles, I will do no act to injure him, and so I forgive him; it will always be a pleasure to think how you outwitted him. You can safely give the names, it will only put me on my guard, and nothing else shall come of it, as I cannot refuse you anything.'

'The worst rascal is dead, Jack Reily. The other now partakes of your hospitality; that poor fellow, Greville, who has just escaped from being poisoned.'

'Mr Knowles, I am lost in astonishment! Let him stay where he is; the only revenge I take, is to kill him with kindness.'

As he spoke, the door opened, and Ethel entered. Mr Beal stepped forward, with

the intention of introducing his companion to his niece, when to his surprise and almost amusement, she ran up to Knowles, threw her arms round his neck, and with tears in her eyes, gave him a kiss. She exclaimed, 'Oh, Warren! Warren! how can I ever repay you for all you have done? Oh! how horrible was last night! Oh! that dreadful grave!'

'Ethel,' he answered, gently returning her salute, 'repay me by asking your uncle to approve of our love. There, Mr Beal, now you can comprehend what a strong motive I had to stand by you and yours.'

'I can! I can! and thank God that you two have met; although I know not the when and where.'

'Well,' answered Knowles, with a smile, 'we met in these very woods. I came to look after the estate, in a quiet way, unknown to tenants and others. Thus I met Ethel, and one afternoon at widow Pickard's cottage, we became engaged.'

'Yes' said Mr Beal, 'that puts me in mind of another debt of gratitude which I owe to a worthy man, and have too long forgotten. A short time now past, when I was at length well enough to exert myself, I sent for a man

called John Pickard, no doubt a son of that very widow, and asked him for a full account of the attack, when I was nearly killed ; he gave me a graphic recital of it all, and especially laid great stress on the prompt arrival of an under-keeper, called John Smith, who, he said, was apprized of the danger by that little dog, Di, who I see knows you so well, he fought like a hero, and saved not only me and Ethel, but Pickard also. You see, Mr Knowles that you also are his debtor ; and you too Ethel are bound to reward him.'

'Must I reward John Smith ?' merrily did Ethel answer, 'as I owe him my life, I will marry him.'

'Are you mad, Ethel, or what ?'

'No,' said Knowles. 'Mr Beal, so far is all this from madness, that I give my consent, and Ethel shall marry John Smith.'

'Yes,' laughed Ethel ; 'And it is such a pretty name, just what should be given to a hero in a novel, I am quite in love with it.'

'Ethel,' said Mr Beal ; 'I have not seen your eyes laugh like that for many a long day, but as you hold Mr Knowles hand, even while you promise to marry John Smith, there must be some pleasing mystery, of which I know nothing.'

‘Uncle, give me a kiss, you dearest old man ; now this is the mystery, even as I told you this morning, Warren last night saved me, when I was buried alive ; sometime past he prevented your bankruptcy and ruin, and when John Smith did such heroic deeds, and protected us all in a real fight, he, Warren, was inside John Smith’s coat, and under one and the same cap.’

‘Is it even so? Why, Knowles, we owe you everything: life, wealth, honour; and yet I prize my niece to such an extent that I think she is almost a full return for everything. No wonder she loves you; and as to your loving her, who, in the name of all humanity, could do otherwise? Ah, now I also remember that it was John Smith who so gallantly and skilfully saved Lady Stagely’s child. By everything that is good, I have seldom been happier than at this moment!’

‘And I, dear uncle,’ said Ethel, as she glanced at Warren, ‘never expected to be half so happy!’

‘Yes,’ added Knowles, ‘this is real happiness, and more especially as we have hearts that can feel and appreciate. Say, Ethel, does it add to your happiness that I am no longer John Smith?’

‘Yes, it is a small joy. Come here, Slip; let me give your dear head a tender pat; there, and there. You and I are alike, for whether in poverty or wealth, in health or sickness, in youth or age, we shall always love the ghost of the gallant Earl of Banbury.’

‘Yes, Ethel, and some day he hopes to be, not the ghost, but in person, Earl of Banbury and Viscount Wallingford; in the meantime we shall have the thorough enjoyment of seeing my father and mother once again settled here at Knowle Manor, and then to welcome all our friends to a wedding; and Ethel, tell me, when is that wedding to take place?’

‘Oh, I shall leave that to my uncle. Now let us take a ride through the woods, and pay a visit to Widow Pickard; and Slip, you shall come too.’

THE END





